

Wanderlust

TRAVEL MAGAZINE

www.wanderlust.co.uk November 2015

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See page 4

ASIA'S BEST BEACHES

Featuring: Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam,
Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia and more...

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- ◆ Amazon
- ◆ Iran
- ◆ São Paulo
- ◆ Gran Canaria
- ◆ Isle of Skye
- ◆ World Guide Awards
- ◆ Bill Bryson exclusive



WE TOOK 4 ARTISTS FROM ACROSS THE UK ON A 7 DAY EXPEDITION TO REDISCOVER THEIR SENSES IN THE AMAZON

To be put in an environment that's so different than what you're normally used to, you start seeing things again through a fresh pair of eyes. I felt reborn in another world, my senses shaken up and reawakened.

Visually the Amazon has an absolutely incredible landscape. There's a constantly changing light in the reflections of the river and the shadows of the trees. Everywhere I looked I wanted to photograph and capture.

The community welcomed me with open arms. They taught me about their relationship with the environment which is radically different to our concepts in Europe. What struck me on all different levels was the sense of love and pride communities have for their environment. You can see this in the respect they have for nature and wildlife.

Being able to see wild animals in their natural environment, to see how they interact with each other in a place that's safe, has taken my breath away.

But what's so amazing about Ecuador is that it really is a country that has so many different faces. The Andes, with its high plateaus and volcanic scenery, is so different to the abundance of the Amazonian rainforest. It's hard to believe it's the same country.

Esther Teichmann, Artist taking part in the Feel Again project in Ecuador

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FEEL
AGAIN
PROJECT



Follow the leader
A good guide can make or break a trip; meet some of the best on page 98

Welcome



One of my most memorable and enjoyable trips ever was to Iran; it completely overturned my preconceptions of the country. With Iran finally (and deservedly) appearing on many people's wishlists, we sent Nick Boulous there (p84) – he was bowled over by the same friendliness and warmth I had experienced.

My trip to Iran was nearly ruined by a misogynistic, boorish and ignorant guide. Fortunately we came across a wonderful local guide and 'kidnapped' him, abandoning the other one. What a difference it made. When I set up the World Guide Awards ten years ago, I very much had that Iran experience in mind. By the time you read this, we will have awarded accolades to another four remarkable individuals who can help you realise the trip of a lifetime (see p102).

Bill Bryson has been a judge and huge supporter of the Awards since they started, and so we were especially pleased that he has a new travel book out (p60) – no-one else can write about Britain and the British better than Mr BB. He would make a top guide himself!

Happy travels,

Lyn Hughes
Editor-In-Chief/Publisher/Co-founder

5 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS ISSUE:

1 Great Britain (243,610 sq km) covers less than 1% of the earth's total surface area. We think. p60

2 In 1872 a hotelier kicked burning embers off Yosemite's Glacier Point, creating a fall of fire – it became a popular tradition; p48

3 In Iran, you can report a bus driver by text if he commits an offence, including not stopping for prayers; p84

4 The Amazon's camu-camu berries pack in more vitamin C than any other fruit; p114

5 If you travel Airbnb-style, you could sleep in a castle, windmill or boat; p70



THE TEAM

What have they been up to this month?



PHOEBE SMITH
♦ EDITOR ♦
Discussing Britain's best bits with legendary travel writer Bill Bryson
SEE PAGE 22 & 60



SARAH BAXTER
♦ ASSOCIATE EDITOR ♦
Seeking out Asia's best beaches for active and cultural adventures
SEE PAGE 30



TOM HAWKER
♦ PRODUCTION EDITOR ♦
Drooling over Amazonian steak and chocolate (but not at the same time)
SEE PAGE 114



RHODRI ANDREWS
♦ EDITORIAL ASSISTANT ♦
Learning how to become a responsible traveller and how to help Nepal
SEE PAGE 14

SPECIAL OFFER



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In memory of co-founder & publisher **Paul Morrison**

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US DISTRIBUTION

Wanderlust, ISSN 1351-4733, is published monthly except Dec/Jan and Jul/Aug combined issues and is distributed in the USA by Pitney Bowes International Mailing Services Inc as mailing agent. Periodicals postage paid at Kearny, NJ and additional mailing offices.

CONTRIBUTIONS & WORK EXPERIENCE

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Newstrade distribution COMAG Specialist: 01895 433800

Footnotes maps Digital Mapping (Tel: 02920 912192)

Office camera Nikon D80

Video camera Sony DCR-SR72

Office binoculars Swarovski EL 8x32s

Staff travel insurance InsureandGo

Brought to you in part by these top guides...



DHEERAJ 'MONTY' BHATT

Indian guide for
Intrepid Travel
(www.intrepidtravel.com)

'Monty' has spent nine years leading tours across India. Find out which prize he was awarded in the 2015 Wanderlust World Guide Awards on p98

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle...?

I am the ocean!

First great travel experience?

My first train journey at the age of 16 from Bundi (Rajasthan) to Chennai (Tamil Nadu). I had no idea it was going to take 36 hours and was worried the morning after leaving that I had missed my stop!

Favourite journey?

Travelling to villages in rural India. I learned so much of our undiscovered culture from them – it changed my life.

Top five places worldwide?

India; Norway; Iceland; USA; Kenya.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

New Zealand.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

USA.

Guilty travel pleasure when guiding?

Being Hindu and eating non-vegetarian food on my travels abroad.



SUE GUTHRIE

Englishwoman obsessed with everything Ethiopian who guides for Explore
(www.explore.co.uk)

Sue calls Ethiopia her second home and has led tours there for the past 12 years, becoming very influential in promoting responsible tourism there. In 2013 she bagged Explore's Deepen Rai guide award – can she pick up another one here? Find out where she placed on p98

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle...?

Ocean and desert.

First great travel experience?

Walking across Namibia with an amazing group of people.

Favourite journey?

My life! It is one incredible and ongoing journey.

Top five places worldwide?

Ethiopia (of course!); Sicily and Amalfi Coast in southern Italy; Mongolia; Cambodia and Mali.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

Djibouti.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

Yemen.

Guilty travel pleasure when guiding?

That is my secret!



MARK STEADMAN

Guides across Asia for
Wild Frontiers
(www.wildfrontierstravel.com)

After forging a career in the music industry, Mark swapped it to lead adventure tours after a madcap trip in Central America. Find out if he's top of the charts at this year's Guide Awards on p98

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle...?

To separate the beauty of a snow-drenched peak from a moonlit ocean lapping a tropical shore is impossible.

First great travel experience?

A six-week boat trip to Australia.

Favourite journey?

A music-themed trip around Latin America inspired by the lyrics of The Clash's *Sandinista!* album.

Top five places worldwide?

Isfahan, Iran; Phonsavan, Laos; Marlborough, New Zealand; Patagonia, Argentina; Southsea, England.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

The one I get every time I return to Iran.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

Another Syrian stamp.

Guilty travel pleasure when guiding?

Carrying as much Laotian coffee as I can!



ORLANDO HARASEB

Former police officer turned guide for Audley
(www.audleytravel.com)

Combining a huge knowledge of wildlife, culture and history, there's nothing Orlando doesn't know about Namibia – but was that enough to see him win at the Guide Awards (p98)?

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle...?

Jungle.

First great travel experience?

Leading a group of seven American ladies for 12 days around Namibia.

Favourite journey?

A trip from Namibia to Botswana for its diversity.

Top five places worldwide?

Etosha National Park, Sanddunes, Tok Tokkie Walking Trail, Hobatere Lodge and Mahango National Park (all in Namibia)

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

Namibian Immigration stamp.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

USA – in particular Orlando in Florida!

Guilty travel pleasure when guiding?

Meeting beautiful women on safari but always having to keep it professional!



Official partner of the FCO's Know Before You Go Campaign



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TRAVEL EXPERIENCED



FACE TO FACE WITH SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka is a lush island of abundant natural beauty and cultural wonders. At its heart lie verdant mountains, full of lakes, waterfalls and tea plantations. Explore exquisite Buddhist temples and remnants of ancient civilisations, seek out elephants, leopards and spectacular bird life in its national parks, and unwind on one of its stunning golden beaches.

Sri Lanka:
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CONTENTS

Issue 161
November 2015



ASIA'S BEST BEACHES

with extra thrills

360° – NEED TO KNOW

- 6 Viewfinder** Awesome aurora, duelling dragons, Holi singers and lofty lakes
- 14 Need to know this month...** How you can help post-quake Nepal
- 16 Go now** Climb volcanoes and drink coffee in Costa Rica – with new direct flights
- 18 Eat this...** Tuck into Cretan cheese pies – they'll help you live longer!
- 22 5 minutes with... Bill Bryson** The author talks Britain's best bits
- 24 Know your... El Niño** Brace yourself for this year's 'little boy'
- 26 Take the kids** Nine family trips that will excite both the young and older

TRAVEL MASTERCLASS

- 70 Booking AirBnB?** Want to swap hotels for castles or houseboats: our guide to this alternative accommodation option
- 73 Instant expert: Nellie Bly** Meet the intrepid 19th-century reporter who undertook a 72-day mission around the globe
- 76 Take better travel photos** David Yarrow shares the secrets of capturing that 'wow' wildlife shot
- 78 Travel clinic** Dr Jane explores the health risks in South-East Asia
- 81 Traveller's guide to... midlayers** We use and abuse a range of the warmest jackets on the market to find which is best for you

▲ Cover story

30 Asia's Best Beaches

Think beaches are just for lazing on? Think again. South-East Asia has super sand for everyone, whether you're into hiking, kayaking, birding, buildings or a bit of everything



▲ Special feature

98 Guide Awards

Drum roll please... we have our top three in Wanderlust's World Guide Awards 2015, but where did they finish?

WIN!

A trip to Western Australia or £3,000 in the Wanderlust Travel Photo of the Year comp, p96

A 15-day trip to China worth £6,000, p136

139



"There's something so other-worldly about Skye that even the most cynical traveller can't help but look expectantly for the supernatural creatures said to inhabit Faerie Glen." *Sally Coffey*

Yosemite NP, p48

48



"It was the variety of terrain that set Yosemite apart. In a single day I'd scramble up rocky crags, cut through forests, jump creeks and trace sandy paths through meadows glowing red with bracken." *Aaron Millar*

Costa Rica, p16

Amazon, p114

São Paulo, p137

114



"We reached Dona Nina's chocolate orchard, sited next to an enormous kapok tree. Our mouths watered. We eagerly accepted samples. The chocolate melted on our tongues, as rich as the Amazon rainforest itself." *Alex Robinson*

BEATING PHILEAS FOGG'S RECORD...

Nellie Bly, p73



FEATURES

- 48 Explore Yosemite** Take a classy hike in the premium wilderness of one of the USA's oldest national parks, 125 this year!
- 60 Bryson on Britain** As the follow-up to *Notes From a Small Island*, is published, Bill gives us an exclusive extract of his latest travels you can sink your teeth into
- 84 Iran** With perceptions changing and travel restrictions easing, be first to head to the latest must-visit destination
- 114 Amazon, Brazil** It's not just wonderful wildlife the great rainforest is famous for: feast on its world-class food and meet the locals on a culinary river ride

FROM THE ROAD

- 106 Your Story** Reader David Higgins jumps in with St Helena's wealth of whale sharks – just why do the huge fish flock to the South Atlantic isle?
- 110 Letters** In our mailbag: trekking Andorra's mountains; trying to spot Botswana's lurking lions; remembering a great guide; meeting Greek wildlife at Meteora; Palmyra remembered
- 111 This Month You Have Been...** Snapping Singapore at night; conquering the Three Peaks Challenge; road-tripping through the USA; dolphin spotting and much, much more...

POCKET GUIDES

- 137 First 24 Hours: São Paulo, Brazil** Brazil's biggest city can seem like a swarm of traffic and concrete, but look a bit harder to find the country's best nightlife and restaurants
- 139 Short Break: Isle of Skye** The Scottish island has inspired countless fairytales: plan your own magical trip to see its dramatic landscapes and dark skies
- 141 Travel Icon: Gran Canaria** This Canary Island is more famous for package holidays but in reality it's a continent in miniature. Hit the trails to explore a land of lush ravines, craggy peaks and winter sun

Isle of Skye, p139

60

"Taken all in all, it has long seemed to me that Britain is just about the perfect size for a country – small enough to be cosy and embraceable, but large enough to maintain a lively and independent culture." *Bill Bryson*

Crete, p18

Gran Canaria, p141

Iran, p84

Nepal, p14

Asian beaches, p30

84

"Tourists are a novelty in these parts. A stroll through any given bazaar, mosque or Persian palace will result in warm smiles, and invitations to tea are not uncommon – certainly not what I expected from this 'land of terrorists and extremists' that makes the headlines." *Nick Boulos*

141

"Gran Canaria is the result of millions of years of volcanic activity, resulting in craggy peaks, craters, sand dunes, lush ravines and impressive rock formations."

TALKING HEADS
Bill Bryson, p22

"The big charm of Britain is that it's effectively infinite – there's always more to be discovered so I know there's enough out there to keep me busy for the rest of my life."



KOMODO COMBAT

Rinca Island, Indonesia

Photographer: **Andrey Gudkov**

It could be a scene from a *Godzilla* movie.

Instead, it's a dramatic action shot taken in Komodo National Park, where two mighty Komodo dragons – weighing over 100kg each – are scrapping for dominance, using their muscular tails for support. This

compelling image, shot by photographer Andrey Gudkov, also fought it out to be chosen as a finalist in the *Wildlife*

Photographer of the Year 2015 competition.

Andrey Gudkov/Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2015. The exhibition is now on at the Natural History Museum, London; (nhm.ac.uk); for full info turn to p20





360°

V i e w f i n d e r



HOLI SINGERS

Nandgaon, India

Photographer: **Sreeranj Sreedhar**

A cloud of yellow fills the air as men singing provocative songs are splattered with coloured powder – just one of the traditions of Nandgaon's unique take on the vibrant Holi Festival. This put-you-right-in-the-action shot, taken by amateur snapper Sreeranj Sreedhar, is just one of the many entries we've received in our 2015 *Photo of the Year* competition – but think you can do better?

Then hurry up, the competition closes soon!

Enter our *Photo of the Year* competition now! The deadline for entries is

31 October – for more details see p96





AURORA AWE

Skånland, Norway

Photographer: © **Arild Heitmann**

The northern lights are one of those bucket-list experiences that every traveller dreams of capturing on camera. Well, photographer Arild Heitmann knows exactly how to do just that. "I love it when the temperature creeps down, way down," Arild explains. "When the landscape is covered in heavy snow and the trees bow to this white blanket, *that* is the best time to shoot the aurora." This magical shot was Highly Commended in the 2015 *Astronomy Photographer of the Year* competition.

See shots from the competition at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich, London, until 26 June 2016; free (rmg.co.uk)





WAY-UP WATER

Andes, Chile

Photographer: **Bernhard Edmaier**

Nestling in Lauca National Park (a popular spot for hikers), the Lagunas de Cotacotani are among the highest lakes in the world, fed by Parinacota Volcano's glacial meltwaters. Award-winning photographer Bernhard Edmaier's striking image – just one of the shots in his new book, *Water*, where his epic images document the titular subject's ability to create and destroy – captures the island-speckled lagoons from above, as they spread almost disease-like from Parinacota's fearsome flanks.

***Water* by Bernhard Edmaier (Prestel, £45) is out now**



12 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW THIS MONTH...

Your November essentials: Bill Bryson talks Britain; Costa Rica opens up; Greece's cheese pies; El Niño blows hard; best family trips and more...

■ Travel issues

1 Taking a trip to Nepal will help its recovery

Don't be put off by the massive earthquakes that rocked Nepal earlier this year, *now* is the time to visit – to have a holiday *and* make a real difference

The violent earthquake, and major aftershock, that devastated Nepal in spring 2015 have deterred many travellers from visiting. Some worry that there could be further destruction and that many of Nepal's historic sites have been damaged. So is now really a good time to visit?

Yes, says Tom Buttle, a trustee of charity Porters' Progress UK (portersprogressuk.org). "Nepal is working hard to recover from the earthquakes," he explains. "But the return of visitors to the country is an invaluable part of the rebuilding process."

Millions of pounds in aid is being sent to help the thousands of people injured or rendered homeless; however, travellers are just as important in Nepal's recovery.

The tourist trade has been hit hard at a time when Nepal needs tourist dollars most. Just by visiting you are helping. And there are so many reasons to go. Many of the historic sites have been reopened to visitors, including the UNESCO-listed durbar squares

of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur and Swayambhu temple. To maximise the benefits, swap big hotels and restaurants for small cafes, family-run guesthouses and homestays – this will support locals directly instead of lining pockets of international brands.

Hikers headed for the Himalaya should reward their guides too, says Doug Scott, founder of charity Community Action Nepal (CAN; canepal.org.uk): "Many guides and porters have lost their main source of income.

Tips are greatly appreciated."

But beware: with so many people in need of aid, there are opportunists and fraudsters around. Be mindful of requests to "sponsor a child's education", advises Doug. Ask your tour operator or guide if they

know of a worthwhile project to donate to.

If visiting Nepal isn't on your agenda now, you can still help. Porters' Progress and CAN hold regular fundraising events; you can also send items such as trekking gear to needy locals.

But, if you can, *visit*. You'll have the trip of a lifetime, knowing that you're helping.

'Many guides and porters have lost their main source of income'



Lending a hand

If hiring porters in Nepal make sure they are treated well – tips are also greatly appreciated

■ The Nitty Gritty

Responsible travel advice

Here are five handy tips on how you can help Nepal:

1 Share the love

If you can, choose locally run restaurants and hotels during your stay in Nepal. Also, try to spread your support across multiple outlets so your visit benefits as many people as possible.

2 Donate clothes to schools

Donations of clothes are always appreciated. However, make sure you deliver items directly to the school, and hand them over to a group of teachers: one teacher alone might be tempted to take them for themselves.

3 Check your porters' welfare

When on trek, make sure your porters are well treated, that they are given plenty of food and that they have suitably warm clothing.

4 Bring gifts

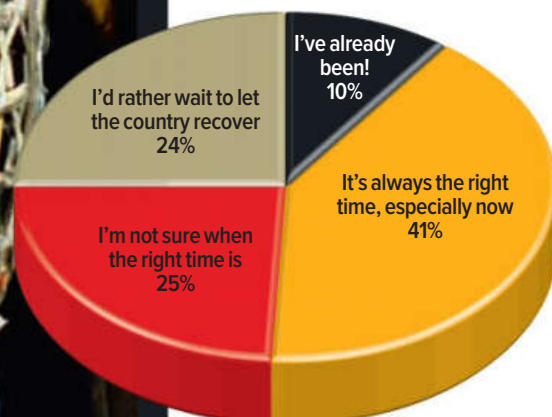
Pack items to give as presents. Shoes, clothes, toys and toiletries are good; donate them via schools or community organisations. Also, many Nepalese people enjoy practising their English, so take the time to stop and chat.

5 Spread the word

You're doing your bit, so encourage others to do the same. Share photos on social media – tell your friends (and everyone else) that Nepal is open for business.

■ Online reader poll

We asked you: When do you think is the right time to visit Nepal following the recent disasters?



New Routes

GO NOW...



Green & glorious
Direct flights bring
wild Costa Rica that
bit closer

2 See whales, cowboys and coffee-pickers in Costa Rica

Why go?

Tiny Costa Rica is the wildlife-dense filling in a tasty Caribbean Sea/Pacific Ocean sandwich. And new flights from Thomson Airways – the only direct flights from the UK to Costa Rica – launching on 2 November make it easier to take a bite. It's good timing too: November marks the end of the wet season, and humpback whales start to arrive.

Thomson will fly into the colonial city of Liberia, in the

north-west, rather than capital San José. If you decide to explore Liberia, visit its Sabaneros Museum, which pays homage to the region's cowboy culture.

A number of the country's national parks are nearby. Rincon de la Vieja NP (28km north-east) is centred on its steaming, nine-cratered, namesake cinder-cone volcano; Santa Rosa NP (42km north-west) boasts beaches that attract green and hawksbill turtles in nesting season (July–November);

Las Baulas Marine NP (80km south) is rife with bottle-nosed, spotted and spinner dolphins.

However, coffee-lovers should venture further south still, to the Central Valley: coffee-picking contests are held in mid-November to celebrate the brilliant bean.

Where to stay?

In Liberia, family-run Hotel Javy does a fine Tican breakfast. B&B doubles from US\$50 (£33); hoteljavy.com.

Get there now!

Thomson Airways' once-weekly Gatwick–Liberia flights launch 2 Nov. Returns from £569; thomson.co.uk

In 2016 British Airways are also launching direct Costa Rica flights, flying Gatwick–San Jose twice-weekly from 11 May. Returns from £687; ba.co.uk

Or how about these...

Ryanair will fly Stansted–Verona from 4 Nov. Fares from £19.99 one way; ryanair.com

TV

3 SEE THIS... Ireland with Simon Reeve

BBC2, from Sat 21 Nov (tbc)



The road rises for Simon Reeve. This time, *Wanderlust* readers' favourite TV traveller is heading much closer to home for this two-part look at Ireland and its identity. On his journey through the country – on both sides of the border – Reeve investigates the myth-rich wilderness, modern divides and complex history, gaining insight from locals along the way.

TV

4 WATCH THIS... Land of the Midnight Sun

ITV, 9pm, from Weds 14 Oct,



Alexander Armstrong swaps the *Pointless* podium for a pair of snow boots to set out across the Arctic Circle. He journeys through a hit-list of *Wanderlust*'s favourite northerly points – from Scandinavia to Alaska, via Greenland and Canada. In fact, you may have been to one (or all) of them yourself, so get ready to feel smug!

Gear

5 BUY THIS... Millican Smith Roll Pack 18L

£95, www.homeofmillican.com



Daypacks are usually all about function, but this one looks great too. It features a zipped padded laptop/tablet sleeve, a security pocket inside and a phone slot, and is made from sustainable, 57% recycled, light, strong, weatherproof canvas. The roll-down top completes the classic look of this practical but stylish pack.



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World Food

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TOP TIP

Other specialities to look out for in Crete include: fried snails, *gamopilafo* (a rich risotto-like rice dish), *askordoulakous* (a wild green, foraged from the hills) and *tsikoudia* (grape brandy, drunk neat).

6 Cretan cheese might help you live longer!

The glorious Greek island of Crete is the perfect place to indulge in a foodie blowout, without the guilty conscience. The local diet here is abundant in fresh local fruit, vegetables, honey and yoghurt; it traditionally includes a limited amount of meat; and, with 1.5 million olive trees dotting the island, healthier olive oil is the primary fat in most dishes. As a result, Cretans lay claim to being some of the healthiest people in the world, with some of the highest life expectancies.

"From the terraced hills, laden with olive trees, to the fields full of goats and sheep, wherever you go in Crete you will find a glimpse of the wonderful food that nature provides us," says Katerina Goniotaki, author of *Cooking with Katerina: Traditional Cretan Recipes*.

One food Cretans do particularly well is cheese. Head to the Wednesday market in island capital Heraklion and you'll be greeted by a pastuerised paradise. Cretan cheeses are typically made from goats' or sheep's milk, and every village seems to have its own variety. Sitia in eastern Crete is known for its rich, creamy *xigala*. In Chania, in the north, look for the sharp *pichtogalo*. In the west, try *sarikopitakia*, cheese-filled pastries named after the scarves worn by the local men.

The southern mountain village of Sfakia is the birthplace of one of Crete's most famous cheese dishes: pies filled with *myzithra* cheese and drizzled with honey, eaten as a snack, starter or dessert. Indeed, they're so popular that they've been given their own event: the first Sfakian Pie Festival was held in August 2015. Roll on 2016!

SFAKIAN PIES

Makes 15 pies

1kg myzithra cheese

500ml warm water

1 teaspoon yeast

25ml raki (tsikoudia)

25ml olive oil

1kg all-purpose flour

Salt

Method

1. Dissolve the yeast in the warm water, then add the raki, olive oil and two dessert spoons of salt.
2. Slowly stir in 1kg of all-purpose flour to make the dough; mix until elastic and not sticking to your hands.
3. Place the dough in a clean plastic bag and leave to rest in a warm place for at least 30 minutes. Meanwhile, roll the cheese into palm-sized balls.
4. After the dough has rested, cut and roll it into fist-sized balls on a floured surface.
5. Spread out each dough ball with your hands and place a ball of cheese into the centre of each one.
6. Fold the edges of your dough over the filling and squeeze them together to form a seal.
7. Leave to rest for ten minutes before gently rolling out your dough balls into thin round sheets.
8. To cook, fry in a pan in hot oil for a few minutes on each side. Serve with honey.

Excerpted from Cooking with Katerina: Traditional Cretan Recipes (Black Bay Publishing, £6.95) by Katerina Goniotaki



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7 What's On UK EVENTS

WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR

London, 16 Oct 2015-10 Apr 2016
www.nhm.ac.uk

Natural History Museum, London SW7 5BD. 10am-5.50pm; from £13.50. Now in its 52nd edition, the Wildlife Photographer of the Year – developed and produced by the Natural History Museum, London – continues to showcase the best of nature photography, with more than 100 of the best shots on display at the museum – including Zsolt Kudich's 'Great Egret Awakening' (right). You even have the chance to vote for your favourite – cast your 'people's choice' vote online.

FAMILY TRAVEL SHOW

London, 31 Oct-1 Nov

www.familytravelshow.com
Olympia, London W14 8UX. 10am-5pm (4pm Sunday); day tickets £12 (£8 advance), weekend £15, under-16s free. Proving that you can have an off-beat trip with kids in tow, the Family Travel Show is full of ideas – from multi-activity adventures to wild safaris. Celebrity speakers, travel bloggers and experts will give talks and tips to help inspire your next jaunt, and there are show-only offers too. *Wanderlust* readers can get half-price tickets when booked in advance – quote 'Wanderlust' when booking online or by phone (0844 209 7360).

ENDANGERED '15: STRIPES & SPOTS, HORNS & TUSKS – WITH PAUL GOLDSTEIN

London, 11 Nov

www.exodus.co.uk/endangered15
The Royal Institution of Great Britain, 21 Albemarle St, London W1S 4BS. 7pm; £15. This impassioned evening, hosted by tour operator Exodus, will highlight the

desperate plight of endangered species. Guide, wildlife photographer and *Wanderlust* contributor Paul Goldstein will chat about how we can help preserve those animals with stripes, spots, horns or tusks, and save them from illegal poaching. Camera specialists and wildlife experts will be on hand to offer advice. There will be a charity auction at the end of the night, too – proceeds will be split between Exodus's tiger project in India and Kenyan peace charity SAFE.

EXPLORE 2015

London, 13-15 Nov

www.rgs.org/explore

Royal Geographical Society, 1 Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR. Weekend tickets £95 (£75 advance), one day £55. Thinking about mounting an expedition? Meet over 90 scientists, researchers and explorers to help gain inspiration for your own field trip. With workshops covering mountaineering, rainforest, polar and desert expeditions – and more – there'll be something to fire your imagination.

KENDAL MOUNTAIN FESTIVAL

Kendal, Lake District, 19-22 Nov

www.mountainfest.co.uk

Events priced separately; film passes available, from £10.50. Enjoy four days of a films, photos and inspiring talks from adventurers.

RAINBOW TOURS PRESENTS

MADAGASCAR

London, 25 Nov

www.rgs.org

Royal Geographical Society, 1 Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR. 6pm; £10 (with drinks and canapés), call 0207 666 1250. Join tour operator Rainbow Tours for an evening all about Madagascar. Hilary



Bradt, founder of Bradt Travel Guides and an expert on the country, will give a talk, as will the charity Money For Madagascar. There will be plenty of time to chat to Rainbow and other travel gurus – not to mention the *Wanderlust* team (yes, we'll be there too!); you'll come away totally fired up about this beguiling Indian Ocean isle. You might even bag yourself a pair of binoculars on the night, courtesy of sponsors Swarovski Optic.

DESTINATIONS 2016

Manchester, 21-24 Jan

London, 4-7 Feb

www.destinationsshow.com

EventCity, Manchester/Olympia, London. From £8 (under-16s free); book online or call 0871 230 7141. *Wanderlust* subscribers will receive two free tickets (look out for them in the February issue); non-subscribers will get a discount. Come to the UK's largest and longest-running travel show! Mingle with specialist tour operators, sample world foods and visit the *Wanderlust* Travel Photo of the Year exhibition – your first chance to see the full gallery of shortlisted images.

There'll also be a jam-packed line-up of talks, presentations and panel sessions from a host of leading travel experts.

ADVENTURE TRAVEL SHOW

London 23-24 Jan

www.adventureshow.com

Olympia. One day £10 (£8 advance), weekend £15 (£12 advance). Seminars £40 each (including entry). Book online or call 0871 230 7159.

Passionate about discovering the world? Or looking for ways to turn that travel writing hobby into a profession? Then join us at the UK's leading event for adventure travel! The show will include over 100 talks, plus opportunities to chat to a huge collection of travel companies. Expedition planners can help you plot your next big adventure, and there's an evening of entertainment with the Adventure Travel Film Festival. For even more advice, book onto seminars, including *Wanderlust*'s travel writing and photography, led by editor Phoebe Smith and editor-in-chief Lyn Hughes and a host of guest speakers – discover great tips on getting into travel writing and getting your work published.

8 The Big Debate

Should airlines be able to charge extra for larger passengers?

With the news that Uzbekistan Airways has plans to introduce passenger weighing machines at departure gates, we asked you: should larger passengers have to pay extra to fly?



YES

Cathy Aitken, *Wanderlust* reader

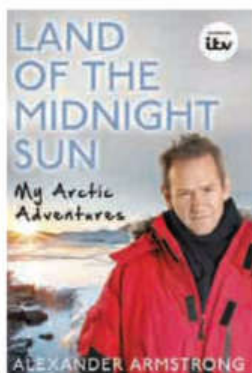
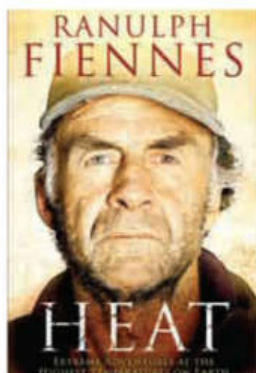
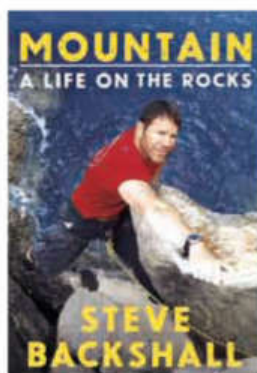
"If charges are made, they should be based on width rather than weight. Sitting next to a person encroaching on your space makes for an uncomfortable flight. It's not only obese people, but those who hang their elbows over armrests. Very tall people already know that they are going to be cramped in the restricted space on modern planes; they have the option to pay more for extra legroom. Perhaps making passengers walk through a gateway that is the width of the aircraft seats could be used to filter out those who are too wide? Obese passengers are becoming more common, and wider (pricier) seats should be provided."



NO

Matthew Morris, *Wanderlust* reader

"I think weighing people at the airport is unnecessarily embarrassing for passengers. Also, where do you draw the line? Take a look at some sports players – they can weight in excess of 120kg, with not an ounce of fat on them! Should they be made to pay more? I fly quite a lot and I have never experienced the discomfort of anyone spilling over into my seating area. Judging by some of the very hostile comments I sometimes read on the internet on this topic, you would think it must happen all the time, but I don't think it's all that common, at least not in my experience."



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Go to wanderlust.co.uk/competitions

■ Read this...

9 You can read yourself inspired

Whether you fancy yourself a polar explorer, a mountain conqueror, a bike pootler or a feminist pioneer, there's a book for you...

The big adventurers are back in book-ness. First, Steve Backshall, whose *Mountain: A Life on the Rocks* (Orion, £19) is as rollicking as you'd expect from the conquering clamberer, but also contains self-critique. Taking him across some of the globe's most petrifying peaks – and into hospital with a broken back – it's a thoroughly readable memoir.

Having frozen his extremities off in his last book *Cold*, it makes masochistic sense that Sir Ranulph Fiennes now heads for *Heat* (Simon & Schuster, £20), an account of his exploits in the planet's most blistering bits: early military meanders in Oman, marathons in the Sahara, jungle journeys in Australia. It's boy's own adventuring with a great deal of context – exciting and fascinating.

Alexander Armstrong fills Fiennes' posh-lad-in-the-Arctic boots. The diary tie-in of his new TV show (see pgr16) *Land of the Midnight Sun* (Bantam, £19) is charming and accessible: anyone wanting to visit the planet's north – Greenland, Sweden, Canada, Alaska – will find a chapter relevant to them.

There's not as much wilderness in the light-hearted *Mail Obsession* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £13), Mark Mason's trapeze through Britain's 124 postcodes, with the objective of finding a fun fact about each one. The mission is more trivia than travel, but Mason is an entertaining companion.

Bambi Smyth also has an interesting hook for *Men on the Menu* (Blink, £10). While the subhead, '75 delicious dates around the world', has the waft of chick-lit, it's an entertaining culinary career through 22 counties, their speciality dishes and yes, their men. Travel foodies, this could be the match for you.

The journey is very much the focus of Linda Cracknell's *Doubling Back* (Freight Books, £9). It's a lyrical ramble in the footsteps of writers and relatives as well as her own past, through Scotland, Spain, Norway and Kenya. Rich, poetic, contemplative.

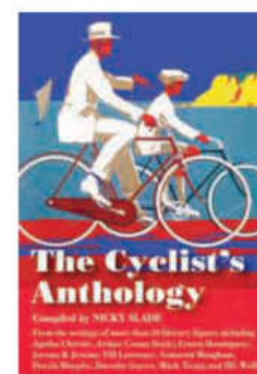
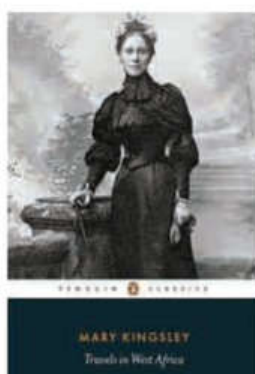
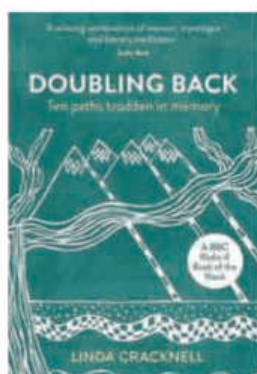
Over a century earlier, Mary Kingsley was also walking Africa (Sierra Leone to Cameroon) while striking a discreetly revolutionary blow for feminism. This reprint of *Travels in West Africa* (Penguin

Classics, £13) is a truly astonishing travelogue, for its remarkable insight and language but also for its revealing snapshot of the colonial politics of the time.

A modern 'portrait of our world' is supplied by Yann Arthus-Bertrand's *Human* (Thames & Hudson, £20), a mix of great photography, info-graphs, interviews and analysis that offers a thought-provoking overview of how we share our planet. Or rather, don't.

Abandoned Places (Harper Collins, £20) is just as revealing about humanity. Richard Happer's book documents the places where civilisation has moved on – due to war, industry, obsolescence – leaving haunting shells of inhabitation.

One of *Wanderlust's* favourite symbols of civilisation – the bicycle – is star of *The Cyclist's Anthology* (Trailblazer, £10). A compendium of literary snippets about two-wheeled travel, it takes in everything from Twain and Hemingway to Bradley Wiggins. It might inspire you to do a little adventuring of your own, perhaps even giving Sir Ranulph a ride for his money.



10

■ Five minutes with...

BILL BRYSON HATES LITTER, LOVES TENBY

At last! A new travel book from our favourite British* writer! Phoebe Smith caught up

You've lived in Britain for a long time and, at the start of the new book, we see you take the citizenship test: so how does it feel to be a Brit*?

It was a very strange experience. On the one hand it didn't feel all that sensational, partly because it just felt like I was getting my papers in order and I also didn't need to give up my American citizenship to get my British one – it was just this little add-on to my existence. Then, I was quite thrilled to get a British passport with my name in it; now I've used it a couple of times for trips and I was quite delighted. I was really pleased to go through the British queue; the last time I came back was with my wife and it was just really nice to go through with her. For years we've been separated every time we go through customs.

Do you get treated any better now you have a British passport?

No I can't say that I do. It's pretty much the same.

Do you find yourself more drawn back to America, now you've been away for so long?

No. I mean, I'm still very very fond of America and I still go there quite happily at least a couple of times a year; I love to go over there and watch baseball and eat cheeseburgers and do all that kind of stuff. But it's not where I want to live anymore. My real permanent life is here now.

It's been 20 years since *Notes From a Small Island* and you've lived here for a long time – were you worried that you wouldn't be able to write from an outsider's perspective anymore?

No, I don't think that ever really goes away. I will always be in this position of spying on you and being slightly remote in a strange way! What I found difficult with the book was the travel. There wasn't any particular reason for me to go to any particular places because most of the

'I love the sort of random wandering and stumbling across places – it's so much more rewarding when you feel like you've discovered a place yourself'

observations I make in the book I could have made just as easily from home. I didn't need to go to Grimsby in order to talk about British attitudes. At certain points I felt not altogether sure why I was there. I could have been at home with my wife!

You've done a lot of travelling in Britain now – do you think you've seen the best bits?

Yes, I think so. As one of the points in the book makes, the big charm of Britain is that it's effectively infinite – there's always more to see. I know there are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of wonderful little villages and stately homes and museums and things that I've not only never seen but not even heard of yet. There's always more to be discovered so I know there's enough out there to keep me busy for the rest of my life. But I do think in a general sense I've seen an awful lot of the country, probably more than most people.

What were the highlights of this most recent journey?

The place I absolutely loved, especially because I didn't have especially big expectations for it, was Tenby in South Wales. I just thought it was enchanting. It was particularly delightful because so many seaside resorts are really struggling. I mean, if you look at Morecambe or places like that, Tenby just seems a very old-fashioned, very prospering, absolutely exquisite seaside resort.

Are there parts of Britain that you haven't yet made it to that you'd still like to see?

Yes, oh gosh! There are loads of parts that I'd like to go back to see more carefully, not least with my wife. One thing is, for the past 25 or 30 years I've done a lot of travelling without her. While I was off having a great time, she was at home raising the children; now our children are grown up, one of the things we do a lot together is travel. We have just come back from the Lake District, we had three days up there. I was getting to show her places in the Lake District that she'd never seen and we hope to do a lot more of that, so there's plenty of places I'd like to show her here around the country.

One of the things I love is the sort of random wandering and stumbling across places. I think it's so much more rewarding and exciting when you come to a place and you feel you've discovered it yourself. If somebody said to me 'You must go to Tenby, I absolutely order you to Tenby,' it would be really nice but the very fact I took the trouble to go there myself and felt like I discovered it made it all the more delightful.

In the book you talk passionately about litter issues in the UK – how do you think we should go about tackling the problem?

I think that, overwhelmingly, most people hate litter. The people who do drop litter are a small minority; some people see stuff on the ground already and take it as permission to add to it.

I think the only practical solution is to get government actively involved. I think it's time the government faced up to its responsibilities. Partly it's education, partly it's punishment for people – you should do something to catch people for doing it and punish them for it. What I think could be really effective is an educational campaign that says to people: Look, you've got a beautiful country, so why trash it? Think before you drop a crisp packet.

with Bill Bryson to find out why he loves GB, and what's next...

Your book makes people really care about what a wonderful place Britain is – how else can we make people care?

Government has a really big role in this. It should be helping to educate people to appreciate what they've got. It alarms me they're relaxing all the planning restrictions; they're sort of planting this idea in people's heads that the countryside is an undeveloped resource and that it's sitting there not paying its way. That seems to me to be the craziest thought possible.

Every single bit of green countryside we have is valuable. Of course, some of it will have to be built on. We're always going to need more space for hospitals and schools and that sort of thing. But it ought to be done with the greatest care. No green field should be built on without a lot of careful thought, that is why you have a planning system. The idea that you would remove that scrutiny and allow people to throw stuff up is just the most short-sighted view I've come across in a long time.

Could *The Road to Little Dribbling* be the start of more travel books?

It's always possible. I do enjoy writing travel books – but I do enjoy writing the other types of books too. I like having a lot of variety in my life so all I can say at this point is I won't be doing a travel book next but I might very well do the one after.

Where would you like to travel?

Oh, so many places! The place that I would personally love to go and spend more time in is Japan. I've only been there briefly and I really loved it. But there are lots of places I've never been to at all. Most of Central and South America. I've never been to India or Russia. There are lots of places I'd love to go and see.

There's lots of choice there and lots of scope for further books!

Yes, well when you consider how much of my life I've been travelling, it's almost all been done as

a result of somebody giving me an assignment or something. Places I've gone have been places chosen for me by other people.

It's great to see your book, *A Walk in the Woods*, back at the top of the charts – due in part to the film.

What was it like to see your life on the big screen, being played by Robert Redford?

It was exciting! I was not directly involved with the making of the movie so I had no idea what I was going to feel like. It was a really interesting experience and, on the whole, mostly delightful.

Has watching it inspired you to do another big walk?

I can absolutely tell you that I would never do anything that required me to camp out and go into the wilderness for long periods. But I do still walk a lot and one of the things I most enjoy is going off walking for a few days – with a comfy bed and hot shower each night!

So, what's next? Have you got anything planned?

No, I don't. We've moved to a new house, for us, nearly two years ago, and because I've been so busy we haven't done all the things with the house we wanted to do. I'm actually just looking forward to having some time to travel with my wife and do some decorating and have some down time. 📺

The Road to Little Dribbling: More Notes from a Small Island (Doubleday, £20) by Bill Bryson, is out now. For an exclusive extract, turn to page 60.

Instant Expert

KNOW YOUR... EL NIÑO

Boy, oh boy
The El Niño weather cycle can cause floods in some places, droughts in others



11

This year's notorious 'little boy' weather event is predicted to be one of the worst on record – but how might it effect your travels?

Every few years or so, warm water from the western Pacific Ocean shifts eastwards towards the coast of South America, setting into action a cycle that effects the climate across the southern hemisphere, with many countries experiencing drastic weather changes. It is known as El Niño ('little boy'). This year's event, which began to take effect in September, is predicted to be one of the worst on record.

Wow. What kind of weather changes?

Scientists can't yet predict the full outcome of an El Niño event. In South America, Peru and Ecuador (including the fragile Galápagos Islands) are usually hit hardest: major flooding causes damage and fish

industries are crippled due to the reduction of cold, nutrient-rich waters. East Africa also endures monsoon-type weather, while south-central Africa, South-East Asia and Australia experience drier conditions, heightening the risk of bush fires.

The effects aren't restricted to the planet's south. Mexico can experience flash floods, the USA can be hit by blizzards and Europe can see cold and wet summers (something the Brits are well used to...).

Should I be wary of certain places?

During the last El Niño event in 2009-2010, Machu Picchu was cut-off as a result of the rising Urubamba River. Authorities had to rescue nearly 4,000 tourists as a result of the floods. But don't let that put you off Peru.

The impact of El Niño is far from certain and, anyway, there's plenty more to see: the Nazca Lines, Colca Canyon, culinary Lima.

Likewise, don't avoid the Philippines, but perhaps swap treks in Mount Apo NP on Mindanao (prone to forest fires during El Niño) for less-affected Bohol island, with its Chocolate Hills and tiny tarsiers.

How can I keep track of the event?

A number of websites give frequent updates on the progress of El Niño. The US National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration keeps tabs at elnino.noaa.gov.

The effects of El Niño will be strongest December-February; if you're travelling to countries at risk, check Foreign Office travel advice (fco.gov.uk).

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12 Be Inspired HAVE KIDS, WILL TRAVEL



Having children is no barrier to having exciting, exotic adventures. Some parents are worried about travelling with youngsters: will the kids endure the plane journey? Will they eat the food? Will they be safe? Will they be interested? But there are plenty of options that are ideal – trips designed with families in mind, that will inspire across the generations. Here's our top pick...

PICKY TRAVELLER

Know when you want to travel but don't know where? Got an activity you long to try but not sure how? Try Wanderlust's Trip Finder: mytripfinder.co.uk

1. Kenya

Gawp at the Big Five

Eating breakfast with giraffes and visiting orphaned elephants are just two of the wonderful wildlife encounters included on **Abercrombie & Kent's A Family Safari to Kenya**. You'll also walk in Laikipia with expert guides, who'll help you track lions and zebra. And you'll explore the Masai Mara from a luxury camp (complete with pool) to tick off the Big Five; visit July-October to see the Great Migration too.

Who: Abercrombie & Kent (01242 547702, abercrombiekent.co.uk)

When: Departures year round

How long: 8 nights

How much: From £5,340/ £1,975 adult/child (incl flights)

2. Finland

Sleep under the aurora

Whizz to north Finland in the school hols on **Off the Map Travel's Half-Term Lights in Lapland** trip. From a chalet in Kilpisjärvi, head out to hunt for the northern lights, both on foot and in a glass-topped Aurora Snowcat. Then ride a snowmobile to the Three Country Cairn – where Sweden, Finland and Norway meet – nipping into Norway to explore the Lyngen Alps by husky-sled before heading back to a Finnish *kota* (hut) with a warming fire.

Who: Off the Map Travel (0800 566 8901, offthemaptravel.co.uk)

When: 15 Feb 2016

How long: 4 nights

How much: From £999 (excl flights)

3. Canada

Spot bears and whales in BC

See the best of Canada without the long drives on **KE Adventure's** intimate *British Columbia Bonanza* trip. Kayak among seals, scale Stawamus Chief (one of the world's largest granite monoliths), bike the Galloping Goose Trail and take a boat trip to look for bears and whales.

Who: KE Adventure (01768 773966, keadventure.com)

When: 9 & 23 Jul and 19 Aug 2016

How long: 12 days

How much: From £2,445/£2,395 adult/child (incl flights)

4. Mongolia

Live like a Mongolian warrior

Become a nomad on a *Mongolia Family Adventure* with **Wild Frontiers**. Learn to fire arrows, paddle a kayak and sleep in a traditional *ger* (tent). Then train for a junior version of the Nadaam Festival before hitting the dunes of Mongol Els.

Who: Wild Frontiers (0207 7363968, wildfrontierstravel.com)

When: Departures year round

How long: 14 days

How much: From £2,660 (excl flights)

5. Morocco

Mix mountain, medina, desert and sea

Zig-zag from the alleys of Marrakech, over the Atlas, into the Sahara, across to the Atlantic and back to Marrakech on **Oasis Overland's** *Souks, Sand Dunes and Surf* trip. Highlights include camel treks and a visit to the old city of Ait Benhaddou, the set of many a Hollywood movie.

Who: Oasis Overland (01963 530113, oasisoverland.co.uk)

When: 23 Dec 2015

How long: 12 days

How much: From £799/£545 adult/child (excl flights)

6. Scotland

Be inspired by a classic

Wilderness Scotland's *Treasure Highland* is inspired by the spirit of Stevenson's tale, which was written in the Cairngorms. This trip does some geocaching in the national park, plus sea kayaking around the Sound of Arisaig and biking in the Great Glen. Also, ride the Fort William-Mallaig steam train to feel like Harry Potter.

Who: Wilderness Scotland (01479 420020, wildernessscotland.com)

When: Year round

How long: 6 nights

How much: From £835/£735 adult/child (excl flights)

7. Peru

Get the kids into the Inca

Have your kids studied the Inca at school? Then show them the real thing on **Journey Latin America's** *Family Peru* trip. Peer into Colca Canyon, be wowed by Cusco, visit Machu Picchu and stroll in the Sacred Valley. Finish up in the Amazon jungle.

Who: Journey Latin America (020 3432 0917, journeylatinamerica.co.uk)

When: Daily, July-Aug 2016

How long: 19 days

How much: From £4,407/£4,122 adult/child (incl flights)

8. Costa Rica

Try a bit of everything

Experience *Active Costa Rica* with **Families Worldwide**. Canoe in Cahuita NP, go choc-tasting, horse trek through Poza Azul's jungle, raft the Sarapiquí, mountain bike around Arenal Volcano and zip-wire through Monteverde's forests. Phew!

Who: Families Worldwide (01962 737560, familiesworldwide.co.uk)

When: Set dates, Dec 2015-Dec 2016

How long: 10 days

How much: From £2,299/£1,699 adult/child (incl flights)

9. Cambodia & Thailand

See mysterious cities and sandy isles

Let your teens have a real *Indiana Jones* adventure on **All Points East's** *Ruined Cities & Tropical Islands* trip – though it's adaptable for kids of any ages. Visit Phnom Penh, explore Angkor's jungly temples, ride Battambang's unusual 'bamboo train' and then retreat to Thailand's paradise isles.

Who: All Points East (023 9225 8859, allpointseast.com)

When: Jul/Aug 2016

How long: 14 days

How much: From £9,200 (family of four, incl flights)

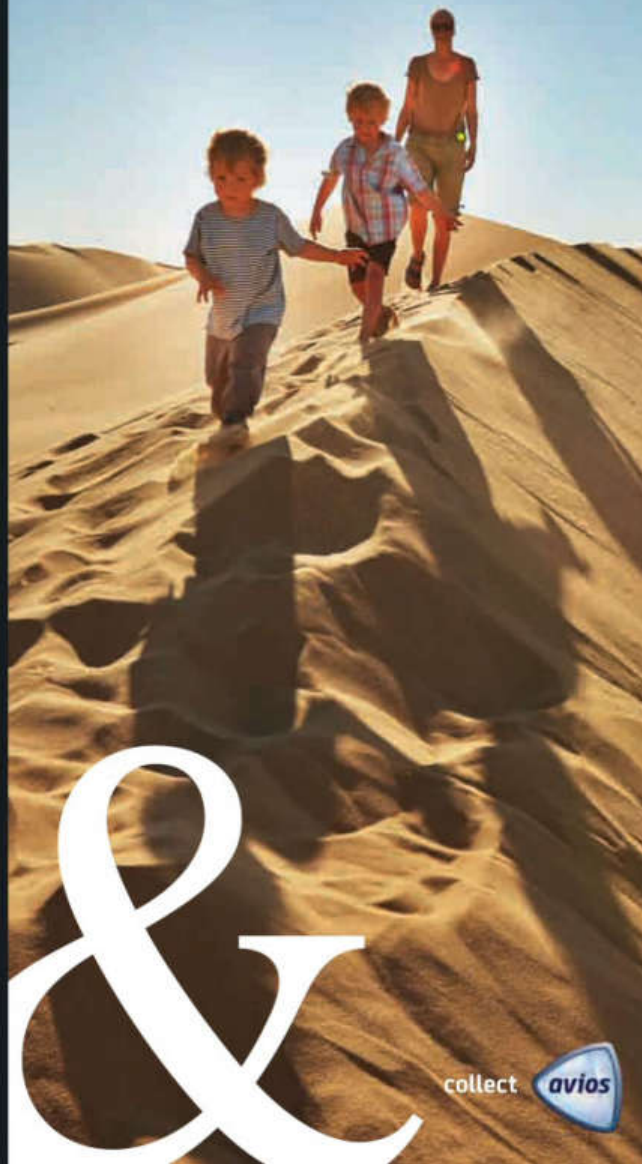
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There are loads of lovely places to just flop on the sand – but where's the fun in that? Here are the 22 South-East Asian beaches that offer a bucket load of adventure...



Best for... Hiking

TELOK PANDAN BESAR & KECIL Bako National Park, Sarawak, Malaysia

Bako is Sarawak's best bits in microcosm – all the state's seven vegetation types are found here, on a chunk of land brimming with wildlife and frilled by mangroves, rocky headlands and pristine beaches. It's also criss-crossed by 30km of walking trails, enabling exciting hikes between deserted sands.

A 2.5km route from park HQ at Telok Assam (telok meaning 'bay') passes a riot of fan palms and pitcher plants to reach the cliffs above inaccessible – but beautiful – Telok Pandan Besar, before continuing over an exposed sandstone rock and through shady forest to reach sandy Telok Pandan Kecil. Long-tailed macaques, monitor lizards and silver leaf monkeys might be seen en route. Alternatively, take the short, low-tide trail round the multicoloured cliffs from Telok Assam to Telok Delima for the best chance of seeing proboscis monkeys playing on the beach.

ALSO TRY: Ujung Kulon NP, Java, Indonesia – This remote national park at the far south-west of Java, is the last redoubt of the Javan rhino. It's possible to do a three-day hike from Tamanjaya village, through a tract of ancient forest – keeping an eye out for wild pigs, otters and gibbons – and along the beach-strewn west coast (look for turtles) to the striking white sands of Pulau Peucang island. ►





Asia's Best Beaches

Best for... sea kayaking

HAT LO PAA RAET & HAT TIIKUT

Koh Yao Yai island, Ao Phang Nga National Marine Park, Thailand

◀ Think part-romantic Chinese landscape, a smidgen of Halong Bay and a bit of James Bond and you have the bay of Ao Phang Nga, which takes up most of the National Marine Park of the same name. Encompassing some

400 sq km of towering karst, gnarled caves, blue waters and maze-like mangroves, the bay is best explored by kayak: paddling is really the only way to wend between the sunken tree roots, find cliff-backed crescents of sand and duck into *hongs*, secretive lagoons reached via tunnels eroded in the rock.

One of Ao Phang Nga's islands was home to Scaramanga's lair in *The Man with the Golden Gun*; unsurprisingly, this is one of the most touristy spots. Instead, stay on the quiet island of Koh Yao Yai, accessible by boat from Phuket and Krabi. The finest beaches here are Hat Lo

Paa Raet, where the sand sparkles and coconut palms sway, and Hat Tiikut, backed by casuarina trees. Laze on these before heading out for a paddle – the uninhabited island of Koh Panak, to the north-west, is a swiss cheese of canoeable caverns, passages and lagoons.

ALSO TRY: Coron Bay, Palawan, Philippines – The Philippines' answer to Ao Phang Nga, here you can also kayak among tiny islets and private beaches. The area is also rich in Tagbanua culture, dotted with hot springs and littered with shipwrecks – some of which lay in just ten metres of water.





Best for... Rocks

HAI PAI BEACH **Lan Ha Bay, Vietnam**

Want to see some famed Vietnamese coastal karst landscapes? Well, Lan Ha is as lovely as UNESCO-listed Halong, but with fewer people. Technically, this bay on the east side of Cat Ba Island is the southern adjunct of more famous Halong, but fewer boats make it here, leaving Lan Ha's inlets, 300-odd limestone outcrops, fish-rich reefs and spectacular beaches all the quieter.

Hai Pai (also known as Tiger Beach) has the requisite good looks – blue sea, yellow sand, picturesque pinnacles – as well as developed climbing routes if you fancy trying to master the karst. It's possible to camp right on the beach too.

ALSO TRY: Laem Phra Nang, Krabi, Thailand – This Andaman Coast headland, accessible only by boat from Krabi town, is rock-climbing and abseiling nirvana, with routes suitable for novices and pros. The beaches of Ao Phra Nang and West Railay aren't without tourists but have the nicest sand on which to stay. ►

Best for... Sand

MUI NE BEACH South-east Vietnam

Plenty of travellers have discovered Mui Ne. But that's because the coast around this little fishing village in southern Vietnam, about 200km east of Ho Chi Minh City, is backed by some of the region's most impressive, Sahara-style dunes. Mui Ne Beach curves for 12km around a bay on the South China Sea; largely low-rise resorts back much of the shore, but the area around the original village, at the eastern end, tends to be quietest. The dunes themselves ripple and roll just behind – the White Dunes are bigger, but the Red are more photogenic and fun to sled down.

Indeed, Mui Ne is a bit of an adrenaline hotspot, with the surf swelling from August to December and breezes attracting wind- and kitesurfers from October to April – fun to watch, even if you don't fancy having a go. The local feel is lost a little (for that, head for Doi Duong Beach in nearby Phan Thiet) but the atmosphere is appealingly surfer-style and laid-back.

ALSO TRY: White Island, Camiguin, Philippines – Have your sunglasses at the ready for this brilliant-white uninhabited sandbar, which is constantly shape-shifting a few hundred metres off the shore of little Camiguin. Boats make the trip out from Yumbing, to strand you on the most dazzling grains, licked by the most turquoise of seas. Postcard stuff. ►



Alamy, Getty





Asia's Best Beaches



Best for... Architecture

BALEKAMBANG BEACH East Java, Indonesia

◀ Balekambang isn't necessarily the best beach for solitude – despite this long sandy stretch's remote location on East Java's south coast, it can be busy at weekends. But that's because people come to see its unusual architecture: at one end of the beach, a bridge runs from land-side Wisanggeni Island to the tiny outcrop of Ismoyo Island, around 100m offshore. The rock is topped by a Hindu temple, where offerings are made to the sea – especially in the three days before Nyepi (Hindu Balinese New Year; usually in March).

Visit the temple (which is particularly photogenic at sunset) and laze on the tree-backed sand before heading inland: the steamy calderas of Mount Bromo National Park are just to the north.

ALSO TRY: Ngwe Saung, Burma – Head for the southern end of this 15km-long sweep of yellow on the Bay of Bengal. Here you'll find the small village of Thazin, palm-backed sand, a relaxed vibe and two golden stupas, built atop a pair of beach-plonked rocks. ▶

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Best for... adventure

SECRET BEACH**Bacuit Bay, Palawan, Philippines**

- ◀ It's tough to pick a best beach from the many on offer around sublime Bacuit Bay. Off the north-west coast of Palawan, this scatter of karst islets and outcrops, incised by jungly rivers and highlighted by luminous strips of sand, is one big sand-lover's fantasy. But Secret Beach offers extra thrills.

Hidden away on Matinloc Island, enclosed in towering craggy cliffs, this scrap of white fringes an almost inaccessible sinkhole. Almost. You need to take a boat and drop anchor by a tiny crack in the rock, then swim underwater, avoiding the boulder almost blocking the other side, to emerge in a magical fish-filled bowl, where the waters lap rock walls as well as that tiny little beach. It's best visited at noon, when sunlight streams in.

When you've finished playing in this private pool, do also visit nearby Kulasa Beach, one of Bacuit's best snorkelling spots, and Helicopter Island, which has fine sand and an underwater tunnel. Boat trips from El Nido, the main town on northern Palawan, will combine the three.

ALSO TRY: Manjuyod Sandbar, Dumaguete, Philippines – This 7km-long shard of white sand only appears at low tide, and its calm and shallow shores are best navigated by stand-up paddleboard. Whale sharks are often seen hereabouts too.

Best for... birds

KOH THMEI BEACH**Ream National Park, Cambodia**

Ream National Park, a wild expanse of mountains, mangrove swamps, coastal forest, coral reefs and clear rivers in southern Cambodia, also comprises two islands. And one of those, Koh Thmei, is the ideal escape for bird-loving beach-goers. There's just one rustic, eco-minded accommodation option here: the cunningly named Koh Thmei Resort, an hour-long boat trip from the mainland fishing village of Koh Kchhang (which itself is a 45-minute drive from Sihanoukville).

Its simple cabins sit on a fluff of yellow, shell-scattered sand and make a good base for both snorkelling and staring at the skies: around 150 species of birds – including grey-headed fish eagle, white-bellied sea eagle and Brahminy kite – live in Ream. Dolphins are often spotted playing offshore too.

ALSO TRY: Ora Beach, Seram Island, Indonesia – At the little-visited, hard-to-reach eastern extreme of the Indonesian archipelago, lies Seram, famed for its feathery residents. Around 120 species of bird – 14 of them endemic – live on the mountainous isle, including eclectus parrots, salmon-crested cockatoo and grey-necked friarbird. From glorious, white-sand Ora Beach you can spot shore birds and make forays into the jungly, tweet-filled interior. ►



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Best for... Snorkelling



PINK BEACH

Komodo Island, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia

◀ The region just west of Flores is best known its oversize lizards: big, black Komodo dragons maraud on the dry, hilly islands of Komodo and Rinca. But this area, protected within a national park, is also an exceptional place to take to the seas. Pantai Merah (Pink Beach) is a pretty prospect – formed from fragments of red corals, it has an unusual rosy tinge.

But offshore it's even more colourful – there is world-class snorkelling directly from the beach, the sand sloping right into a pristine reef of vibrant corals and sponges, teeming with technicolour fishes. These waters also offer chances to see snappers, parrotfish, the occasional turtle, reef sharks, manta rays, dolphins and dugongs.

And as most people are busy looking for dragons, even the finest snorkel spots aren't too crowded. The beach has no accommodation options, but Komodo has some basic cabins, or you can stay in Labuan Bajo, on Flores.

ALSO TRY: Ko Adang, Thailand – There are 51 islands within eye-wateringly paradisiacal Tarutao National Marine Park, adrift in the Andaman Sea. There is wild jungle hiking on land, and spectacular snorkelling offshore. Lush, virtually untouched Ko Adang has bungalows on its pretty main strand, but also secret beaches only accessible by boat – some of which are favoured by sea turtles. There are reefs all around, offering excellent snorkelling too. ▶



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Best for... local culture

MA KYONE GALET Bo Cho Island, Myeik Archipelago, Burma

◀ There are more than 800 islands in the Myeik (Mergui) Archipelago, and goodness knows how many beaches. But the sand fronting the village of Ma Kyone Galet isn't just forest-fringed and pretty, it's a prime place for meeting Burma's Moken – the so-called sea gypsies. The Moken traditionally live their whole lives on the ocean, coming ashore only in the roughest weather, but recent years have seen several hundred settled on Bo Cho. Dropping anchor here, you can stroll along the sandy main street, lined with shops and stilt houses; you can walk up to the small Buddhist temple; and you can watch the men bring the catch ashore in the morning before feasting on the freshest of fish for lunch.

The best way to get there, and to the rest of the Myeik Archipelago, is on a multi-day cruise expedition from Kawthaung, southern Burma.

ALSO TRY: Damai Beach, Malaysian Borneo – The Santubong Peninsula (35km from Kuching) has been inhabited since 3000 BC; the first and only Sultan of Sarawak is buried at the base of its sacred, climbable mountain, 810m Gunung Santubong. Damai Beach is an ideal jump-off for cultural exploration – the Sarawak Cultural Village is just inland.

Best for... location kudos

WHITE SAND BEACH Samosir Island, Lake Toba, Sumatra, Indonesia

This particular sliver of waterfront sits on an island within the world's biggest crater lake, dimpling the island of Sumatra. As you laze on the pale grains, Lake Toba laps the shore, water buffalo work the surrounding pastures and the rugged edges of the vast caldera lie off in the distance – a compelling view.

There is far more to Samosir Island, though. The beach hugs Tuk Tuk, Samosir's main tourism hub, where boats zip across from Parapat. The village also offers an intro to the island's Batak people and their culture – a mix of Christian and animist beliefs, puppet dances, stilted *rumah bolon* houses and cannibalism (phased out in the 19th century). Head south to the traditional settlement of Tomok to see the elaborately painted and gabled houses, neat rice barns and the impressive tomb of a key Batak chief.

ALSO TRY: Son Doong, Vietnam – Adventure indeed: this beach sits within the world's biggest cave. Secreted inside Phong Nha Ke Bang NP, the Son Doong cave system is explored on a five-day jungle expedition from Dong Hoi, central Vietnam. While nosing around the colossal cavern (so big it has its own rivers and jungle), you'll camp on the soft subterranean sand.

Best for... turtles

TURTLE SANCTUARY BEACH Perhentian Besar, Malaysia

Sunshine, salt-white sand, crystal-clear seas... the Perhentian Islands, off the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia, tick the basic beach-beauty box. But on larger Perhentian Besar, a 30-minute speedboat ride from Kuala Besut, there is also the opportunity to join a local community-focused Ecoteer project to help protect the region's endangered sea turtles.

Tasks include night patrols to safeguard females that come onto the beach to nest as well as active daytime research: the seas here offer high-visibility snorkelling, and volunteers collect data on the habits of individual turtles while swimming alongside them.

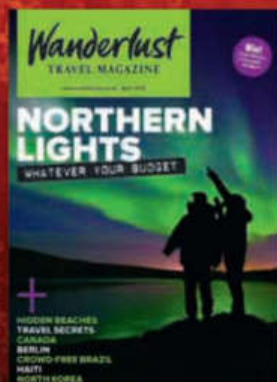
ALSO TRY: Hat Mai Khao, Phuket, Thailand – Phuket is hardly undiscovered, but Hat Mai, on the north-west coast, is the island's least-visited beach. Well, least-visited by humans that is. Located within Sirinat National Park, lovely, deserted, 11km-long Hat Mai is frequented by sea turtles, which come to lay eggs here between November and February.

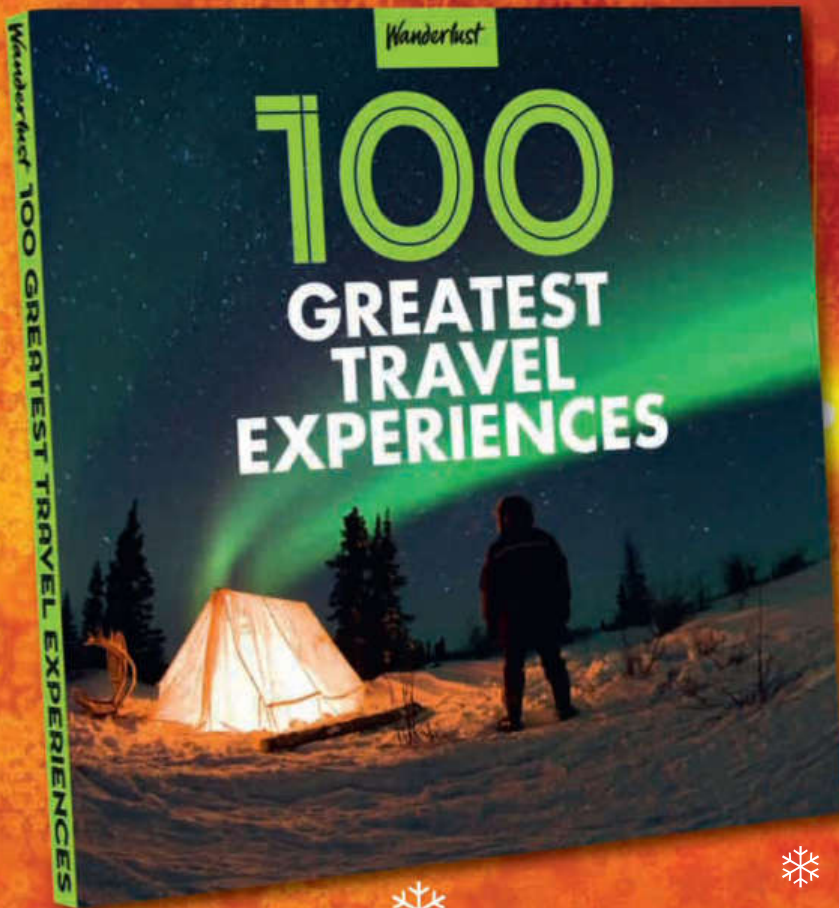
Also, the flanking forest is rich in varied tree species – tropical almond, black plum and elephant apples – which attract a flurry of birds, from orioles to drongos. 🦋

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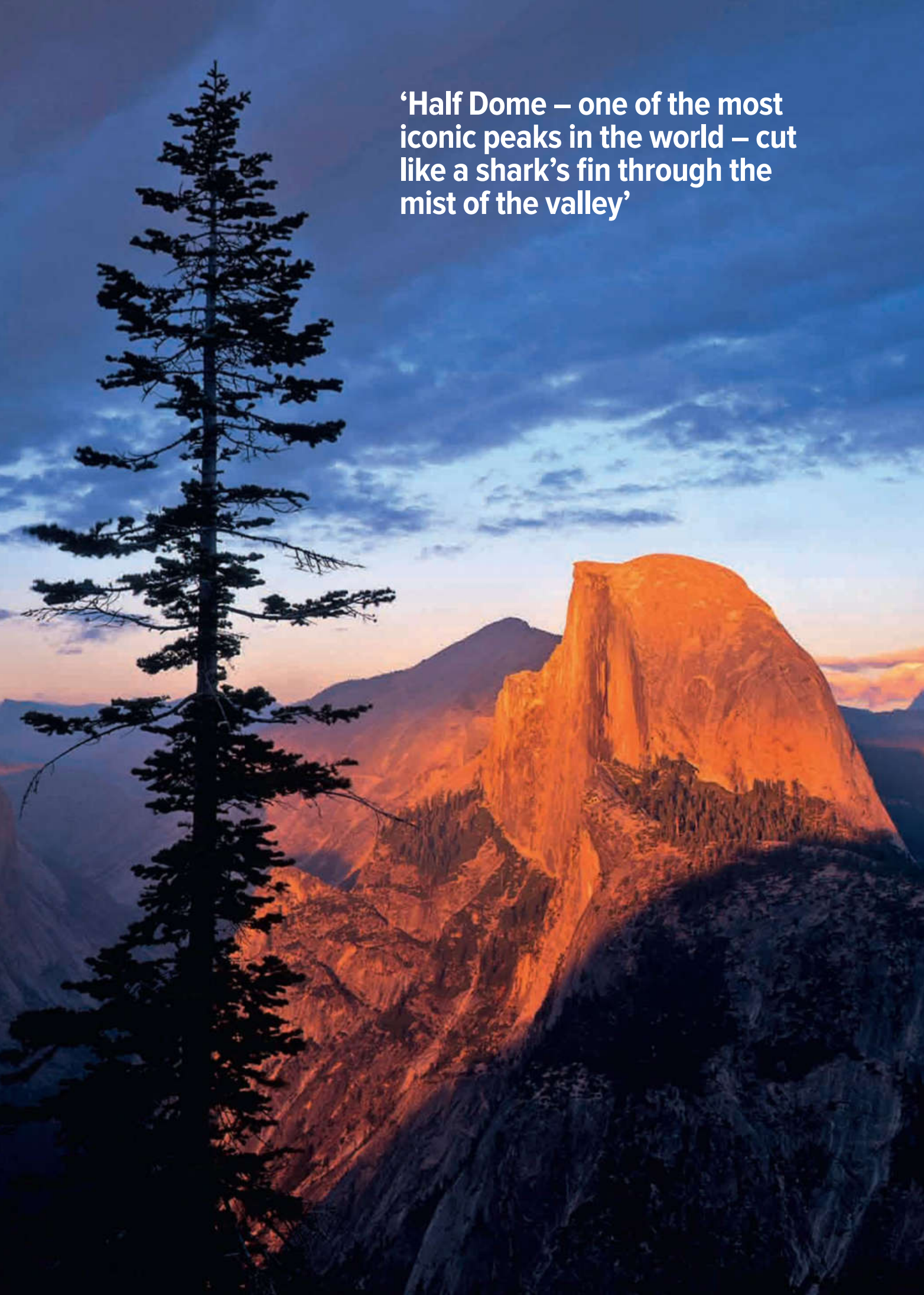
There's no need to deprive yourself in order to celebrate the 125th anniversary of Yosemite National Park. Take a high-class hike into the backcountry of this premium wilderness

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **AARON MILLAR**

Camera classic
Much-photographed
Tunnel View was most
famously snapped by
Ansel Adams



‘Half Dome – one of the most iconic peaks in the world – cut like a shark’s fin through the mist of the valley’



The high country of Yosemite is wild and vast and guards its secrets well. From where I had arrived, standing on the edge of Tunnel View – a vista made famous by the great photographer Ansel Adams – the Sierra Nevada rose like jagged cathedrals of stone. Sunbeams broke over the neck of Clouds Rest ridge and the cracked edifice of Half Dome – one of the most iconic peaks in

the world – cut like a shark's fin through the mist of the valley.

Four million visitors a year come to Yosemite; most never stray from this lowland view. Headlights snaked through the sunrise, crowds chattered. But my eyes gazed upwards. There's a silence and a glittering emptiness in the High Sierra that dares you in.

And that's why I was here. October 2015 marks the 125th anniversary of Yosemite National Park – 3,100 sq km of north-eastern California, filled with waterfalls, high alpine lakes and granite giants smoothed over the centuries like enormous slabs of silk. When it was founded, Yosemite was a groundbreaking statement. The end of the 19th century was a time of industrial progress over nature; that these wild lands should be left untouched and actively preserved was a revolutionary idea. And it spread. Yosemite was the first government-protected wilderness area in the USA, and its second surviving national park. Now there are 59 in the country and thousands of others around the world.

One man in particular was instrumental in that cascade. John Muir, the legendary naturalist and grandfather of the environmental movement, spent a summer working as a shepherd in Yosemite in 1869. His account of that time, *My First Summer in the Sierra*, has since become a seminal text in environmental literature, helping to spread the concept of conservation around the world. He later spent decades lobbying for the formation of the national park, wrote dozens of magazine articles and numerous books about Yosemite, helped extend and draw up its boundaries, and founded the Sierra Club – now America's largest grassroots environmental organisation, with more than two million members.

To celebrate the anniversary I planned to go back to the high country that inspired Muir and led to the Yosemite we know today. I wanted to discover something of that remote wilderness, which – 125 years on – is still largely unaffected by human touch. But while Muir slept out in the open and hiked with nothing more than a few scraps of hard bread in his pocket, I had something altogether more civilised in mind.

Well-heeled hiking

Catered camping is the premium economy of the backpacking experience. Not quite the first-class glamping suite masquerading as a tent, but not the cold ground and freeze-dried food of economy canvas-dwelling either. I planned to walk the High Sierra Camp Loop: a 79km long-distance trail through the backcountry of the park, serviced by six catered camps along the way – many of which have been pampering visitors for close to a century. They provide shared bunk-style tented cabins, hot meals and decent toilets. You carry a light pack, have no chores and feel like a camping king. "It's backpacking for the moderately well-off," one bunkmate, Terry, was to tell me. "You feel less like a mule." ►

High Sierra style
The comfy tent cabins (and pristine toilets) at Camp Vogelsang offer high-class hiking



Fire friends
There's great camaraderie at the High Sierra Loop's bush-luxe campsites



‘Without the usual backpacking chores of setting up tents, cooking and cleaning, there was time to relax. I met one couple who spent the entire day reading books by the river’

◀ The walking, of course, is still down to you. It's possible to do the loop in either direction, but it's easiest to start and finish in Tuolumne Meadows, the main backcountry hub, 90km north of Yosemite Valley. However, limited availability – the park's Achilles heel – meant that I'd be starting at May Lake trailhead, the far west of the loop, and making my way round clockwise instead. The usual five camps and six days to complete the route became three camps and four days. No problem, I thought, I like a challenge. And then I climbed the first mountain.

In the loop

Mount Hoffman is the geographical centre of the park. From its 3,300m-high bare, rocky summit, Yosemite unfolds in a breathless 360° panorama of brush-stroked granite peaks, like storm waves frozen in place. It was one of Muir's first mountains in the Sierra, so it would make a perfect start for me too. But it wasn't easy. I gasped, sweated and switch-backed until the shade of the forest gradually faded and the route became sporadically lined with lonely, wind-broken trees.

As I climbed, secret valleys began to appear too, with dark lakes edged in turquoise and distant peaks shrouded in wildfire smoke blowing in from the east. Near the summit I lost the trail, emerging

suddenly on the edge of a 600m precipice, my hands white-knuckling the rock as if my body might spin into the air. But it was worth the struggle: the beauty of a view is relative to the effort required to see it – and the best are always hard won. I walked to the edge of the precipice and howled at the world below.

My first night was spent at the base Mount Hoffman in May Lake camp – eight canvas tent-cabins on the edge of the water with the tag line, 'Defining utopia since 1938'. Inside each one were four dormitory-style steel frame beds stacked toe-to-toe, plus warm blankets, a fluffy pillow and a wood-burning stove. Outside, children squealed in the cold shallows, fishermen cast off rocks and a couple snoozed in sunny reeds nearby. We had hot drinks at sundown – cocoa, coffee and a proper cup of tea – and then filed into a communal dining tent for fresh-baked bread, soup, pasta and a spicy apple crumble, all served in big help-yourself pots. As we ate, a deer suddenly peered in from one of the windows, giving us all a shock. "Don't worry," camp manager Brian Shoores said, "we pay those guys to scare the bejeesus out of you when you go pee in the night."

After dinner, Brian told us stories about the park's history, including a unique Yosemite tradition known as 'the firefall'. In the late 19th century, before the park was even signed into existence and the first tourists were just beginning to arrive, an enterprising

Irishman named James McCauley built a hotel on Glacier Point, overlooking a sheer drop of 900m to the valley floor. Business was tough, so one night he built a bonfire on the edge of the cliff to attract customers, but when no one showed he kicked the embers off the ledge in dismay. Those that saw the fire falling from below were amazed at the spectacle. He had a hit. For almost 100 years, until the practice was stopped in 1968, visitors would shout up at sundown to Glacier Point for the fire to fall and a river of flames would come tumbling down.

Finding the spark

The next morning I set off for Glen Aulin, 12km north – a beautiful camp beside a 24m waterfall; I dived into its icy pool at the end of the long, hot day.

Then, the following day, I looped my way southwest, a hard 33km to the high alpine pass of Vogelsang. Rather than stay at the camp there, I dropped steep and fast to Merced Lake – an old cavalry station-turned-camping ground, shaded in a grove of enormous old-growth trees. I swam in secret lakes, picnicked on hidden beaches and fell asleep on slabs of warm stone. I watched the sunrise reflected in mirror water and the Milky Way light up in the arc of a new moon. I hiked hard, till my heels ripped and my shoulders burned. But I lingered too, noticing small details: the scent of pine needles warmed by the heat of summer, how wildflowers spring from the ash of lightning-burnt forests.

But it was the variety of the terrain that set Yosemite apart. In a single day I'd scramble up rocky crags, cut through forests, jump creeks and trace sandy paths through meadows glowing red with bracken. It was like walking through a film set with the backdrop on ever-changing loop. There was space too. Immense rocky spires rose from the valley like enormous stone totems.

Dizzying views opened up on every corner. It felt like a land of giants: too big and uncontained to be real. The more I walked, the more I felt like I was falling.

Camp life fell into an easy routine too. Breakfast was hash browns, sausages and eggs, and French toast smothered in maple syrup. The loos were glorious, shining things. I opened the first dark-wood shack with a pinched nose but found flushing water and glistening porcelain that would have put my student digs to shame. Every night was like your mum's best dinner – salmon smothered in horseradish aioli, pulled pork, homemade chocolate cake. I made friends and shared cabins with different bunkmates each night, including a pair of gung-ho grannies who giggled when I got changed for bed.

Without the usual backpacking chores of setting up tents, cooking and cleaning, there was time to relax too. I met one couple who spent the entire day just reading books by the river. "It beats the pool at the Hilton," they told me. But the simple luxuries didn't take away from the dirt and camaraderie of the outdoors. It felt like the Goldilocks zone of adventure – not so tough your holiday becomes a hardship, not so soft your adventure disappears.

On my last night we sat around the campfire with Ranger Mike from the National Park Service, who was leading a group through the High Sierra. He played guitar, told stories and even made us all stand up and enact a little campfire dance – mortifying for an Englishman but, surrounded by American ►

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Clouds Rest ridge
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‘Four billion years of evolutionary common sense were screaming at me to get down. But I persevered and, in a torrent of swear words and sweat, somehow scrambled on all fours to the top’

◀ enthusiasm, I joined in. He also talked about conservation. Yosemite has dozens of programmes, from restoring groves of giant sequoias to monitoring populations of endangered frogs. But the broader purpose of the park, he said, transcends its boundaries. Conservation, he explained, is fed by a love of the outdoors; apathy can be starved with a single sunset. “That’s what I do,” he said. “I set a spark in people.”

Up in the Clouds

The final day was the hardest, but also the most spectacular. Clouds Rest – that peak I saw in distant silhouette on my first sunrise in the park – is a knee-tremblingly thin knife-edge ridge with enough air on either side to cower a goshawk. I’d had vertigo before but nothing like this. Four billion years of evolutionary common sense were screaming at me to get down. But I persevered and, in a torrent of swear words and sweat, somehow scrambled on all fours to the top.

It was like nothing I’d experienced before: a peak so exposed it felt more like parachuting than standing on solid ground. On a clear day it’s said you can see all the way from Nebraska in the east to Hawaii in the west. Well, perhaps not. But it was a magnificent outlook.

I could trace the route of the High Sierra Camp Loop too: Mount Hoffman where I began; the sharp ridges of Vogelsang Peak; Little Yosemite Valley falling 1,800m to the ground below. It has taken me 19km, seven hours and more than 900 vertical metres to get here that day – and I still had 11km to trek down. That summit took all my water, parched my throat and bled my feet. But it was worth the pain. There are moments in the mountains that you carry forever.

And there was still one moment left. As I staggered down from the high country at the end of the day, delirious in a daze of thirst and dirt, my legs burning and numb, I came across a lake of pure lilac surrounded by granite domes and thick log-pole forests. Sitting at the base of May Lake trailhead, Lake Tenaya marked the end of my journey and I threw off my clothes and jumped into the soft water in triumph.

Muir had envisioned a place where ‘thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilised people [would begin to find out] that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity’. Perhaps that’s the secret Yosemite’s high country dares us to find. I looked up one last time and smiled. There was still silence and a glittering emptiness, but the wildness was in me now too. ■




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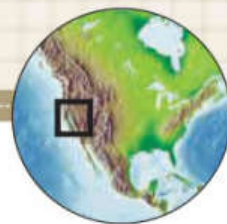
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Yosemite, USA Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Location: California, USA
State population: 39 million
Language: English
Time: GMT-8 (Mar-Nov GMT-7)
International dialling code: +1
Visas: British nationals travelling via the Visa Waiver Scheme require an ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorization; \$14; esta.cbp.dhs.gov/esta). Apply at least 72 hours before travel.
Money: US dollar (\$), currently around \$1.55 to the UK£. Within Yosemite NP there are ATMs in Yosemite Valley, Wawona and Tuolumne Meadows.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ **Spring:** waterfall season. Many backcountry sites remain closed. Variable weather, relatively warm days.
 ■ **Summer:** hot and mostly dry weather; full backcountry access. Crowded, especially during school holidays.
 ■ **Autumn:** mostly good weather, quieter. Limited access from early November.
 ■ **Winter:** cold, snowy, empty and beautiful. Badger Pass Ski area opens mid-December.

⚠ **Health & safety**
 Beware of **altitude** sickness, unpredictable weather and **wild animals**. Take usual mountain precautions, especially boiling water and checking for ticks.

📖 **Further reading & information**
My First Summer in the Sierra (Dover Publications; first published 1911) by John Muir
Yosemite (Bulfinch, 1995) by photographer Ansel Adams
visitcalifornia.co.uk – official California state tourist board website
yosemiteexperience.com – Yosemite/Mariposa County Tourism Bureau

🌐 **More online**
 Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/161 for links to more content:
ARCHIVE ARTICLES
 ♦ The USA's wildest national parks – issue 148
 ♦ Redwood National Park, California – issue 88
PLANNING GUIDES
 ♦ USA travel guide

THE TRIP

✈ **Getting there**
 The quickest way to reach Yosemite from the UK is by **flying into San Francisco**, a 4.5-hour drive from the park. **British Airways** (britishairways.com) and **Virgin** (virgin-atlantic.com) both fly direct from London, with returns from around £600; flight time is 10.5 hours.
 Los Angeles (6hr drive) and Las Vegas (8hr drive) are alternative options.

🚗 **Getting around**
 Hiring a car is the easiest way to get to Yosemite, and useful (though not essential) to have inside the park.
Affordable Car Hire (affordablecarhire.com) has cars from £18 a day.
 Alternatively YARTS (yarts.com) runs **buses** to the park from Sonoma, Merced, Fresno and Mammoth Lakes; returns cost around \$30 (£20). Greyhound Buses (greyhound.com) run from San Francisco to Merced multiple times daily to connect with YARTS.
Free shuttles run throughout the park.

£ **Cost of travel**
 Most items cost the same as, or are slightly less expensive than, the UK equivalent. **Entrance to the park** costs \$15 (£9.70) if you arrive on foot, by bike or on a bus. Otherwise the cost is \$30 (£20) per car, April-October; \$25 (\$16) in other months.

(£20) per car, April-October; \$25 (\$16) in other months.

🛏 **Accommodation**
 The **High Sierra camps** cost \$180pppn (£118) including breakfast, dinner and lodging. Due to high demand, reservations are available on a lottery basis with applications accepted September and October, and winners notified in January. Any remaining spaces can be booked from the end of January (yosemitepark.com/high-sierra-camp-how-to-apply.aspx).

🍴 **Food & drink**
 Breakfast and dinner are included at the High Sierra camps. **Packed lunches** can be purchased on site for \$16 (£10). Take additional snacks, which can be purchased in Yosemite Valley, Tuolumne Meadows or Crane Flats before setting off.
Alcohol is not available at the camps. For a delivery charge of \$5 (£3.25) per pound-weight, booze can be brought up by mule train; arrangements must be made in advance (yosemitepark.com/high-sierra-camps.aspx).

YOSEMITE HIGHLIGHTS

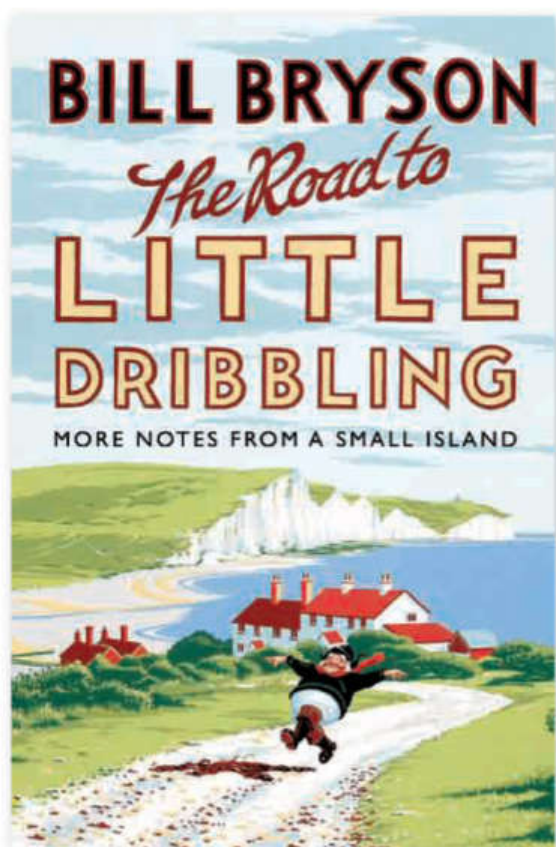
- 1 Half Dome**
 The hardest day hike in Yosemite takes you to the top of the park's most famous peak. The trek takes ten to 14 hours, and includes 1,460 vertical metres of ascent and a terrifying final scramble (using chains). Permit required.
- 2 Waterfalls**
 Yosemite has dozens of waterfalls, including some of the largest in the country. Come in spring to see them at their most impressive. Bridalveil, Horsetail and Sentinel Falls are a few of the most popular.
- 3 Glacier Point**
 This is one of the best viewpoints in the park, overlooking Yosemite Falls, Half Dome and Yosemite Valley.
- 4 Giant sequoia trees**
 Mariposa Grove is closed until spring 2017, so instead go to Tuolumne Grove to see giant sequoia trees, including the dead 'tunnel tree'.
- 5 El Capitan**
 One of the world's tallest, scariest and most prized rock climbs – an amazing sight. But there are plenty of other routes in Yosemite catering to beginner and advanced climbers alike.
- 6 Yosemite Village**
 The park's main tourist hub has an interesting museum, Ansel Adams gallery and lots of great hiking options through Yosemite Valley. Some of the best chances to see black bears in the wild are also nearby.



BRYSON ON BRITAIN

The man from Des Moines has made this Small Island his home, and in an exclusive extract from his new book, *The Road to Little Dribbling*, Bill Bryson explains what he thinks is so great about Britain...

WORDS **BILL BRYSON**





Epic edges
No one in Britain is ever more than seventy miles from the coast, which includes dramatic bits like the Seven Sisters, East Sussex



Now here is a question that is harder to answer than you might think: Is Britain a big country or a little one? Looked at one way, it is self-evidently small, a modest chunk of land floating in chilly waters off the northwestern edge of Europe. Of the total surface area of Earth, Britain occupies just 0.0174069 per cent. (I should note that I can't absolutely vouch for that number. It was calculated for me by my son some years ago for a newspaper article I was writing. He was only about thirteen years old at the time, but he had a calculator with over 200 buttons on it and he seemed to know what he was doing.)

By other measures, however, Britain is incontestably substantial. Amazingly, it is the thirteenth largest land mass on the planet and that includes four continents – Australia, Antarctica, America and Eurasia-Africa (which geographers, being anally retentive and unimaginative, classify as a single mass). Only eight islands on Earth are bigger: Greenland, New Guinea, Borneo, Madagascar, Baffin, Sumatra, Honshu and Vancouver. By population, Britain is the fourth largest island state, behind only Indonesia, Japan and the Philippines. By wealth, it is second.

Measured by decent music, old stony buildings, variety of boiled sweets and reasons for not going to work because of the weather, it is number one by a very large margin. Yet it is only seven hundred miles from top to bottom and so slender in profile that no one in the country is ever more than seventy miles from one of its edges.

Taken all in all, it has long seemed to me that Britain is just about the perfect size for a country – small enough to be cosy and embraceable, but large enough to maintain a lively and independent culture. If the rest of the world vanished tomorrow and all that was left was Britain, there would still be good books and theatre and stand-up comedy and universities and competent surgeons and so on. (Plus England would get to win the World Cup every time and Scotland would always qualify.) This cannot be said of many other nations. If Canada were the only country to survive, ►



**Directing the
countryside**
In 2007 Bryson
was made president
of the Campaign
to Protect Rural
England



‘The next day I did the one thing you should obviously never do. I looked for more information on the internet. Walkers in Britain, it seems, are killed by cows all the time’

◀ the world would be a nicer, politer place, but there would be way too much ice hockey. If it were Australia, you’d have terrific barbecues and surfing but a greater dependence on Kylie Minogue for musical entertainment than is, with respect, ideal.

Interestingly, the thing that made me realize that Britain is an optimal size was the rarely discussed subject of cow attacks. This is a topic that we don’t pay as much attention to as perhaps we ought. I first heard about cow attacks some years ago while walking on the South Downs Way with a journalist from a walking magazine. I had just become president of the Campaign to Protect Rural England and he was interviewing me about the countryside. At some point – we were crossing a field in the vicinity of the Devil’s Dyke, near Brighton, if I recall correctly – he mentioned that we should proceed cautiously because there was a bull in our field.

‘You’re kidding,’ I squeaked, but sure enough, watching us lugubriously from about fifty feet away, was a great rectangular block of beef.

‘Just walk normally,’ my companion instructed in a taut whisper, ‘or you’ll attract his attention.’

‘But we’re on a national footpath,’ I protested, my sense of unfairness momentarily outweighing my instinct to exit sharply. ‘Surely a farmer can’t put a bull in a field with a footpath through it,’ I added. I turned to see what my companion had to say about this and discovered that he was about seventy yards further on and running like hell. I waddled briskly behind him, casting glances over my shoulder, but the bull stayed rooted to his spot.

When we were both safely on the other side of the field wall, I repeated my complaint that surely it was not legal to put bulls in fields with footpaths. ‘Actually it is,’ my companion told me. ‘The rule is that bulls can be placed in fields with public rights of way as long as they are kept with beef cows and not dairy cows.’

I was of course bewildered by this. ‘Why one and not the other?’ I asked.

‘No idea. But the real danger,’ he went on, ‘is cows. Cows kill a lot more people than bulls.’

Whatever is the next level beyond pained incredulity is the level I reached now. For years I had been striding boldly through herds of cows in the belief that they were the one group of animals larger than a chicken that I could intimidate with the shake of a stick, and now this was being taken away from me.

‘You’re kidding,’ I said again.

‘Afraid not,’ he responded in the solemn tone of someone with experience in the matter. ‘Cows attack a lot.’

The next day I did the one thing you should obviously never do. I looked for more information on the internet. My informant was right. Walkers in Britain, it seems, are killed by cows all the time. Four people were fatally trampled in one eight-week period in 2009 alone. One of these unfortunates was a veterinarian out walking her dogs on the Pennine Way in Yorkshire. This was a woman who understood animals and liked them, probably had treats for cows in ▶





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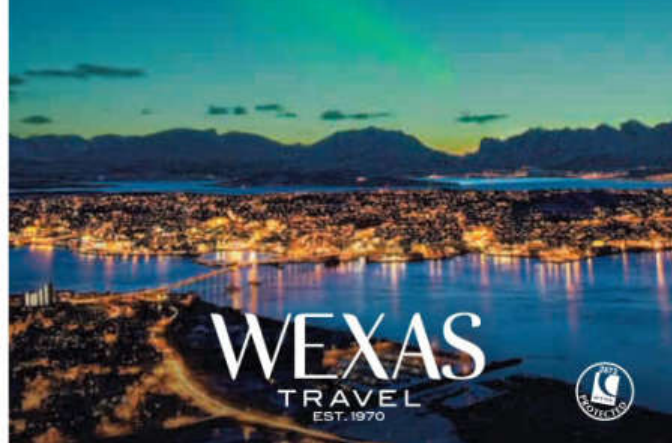
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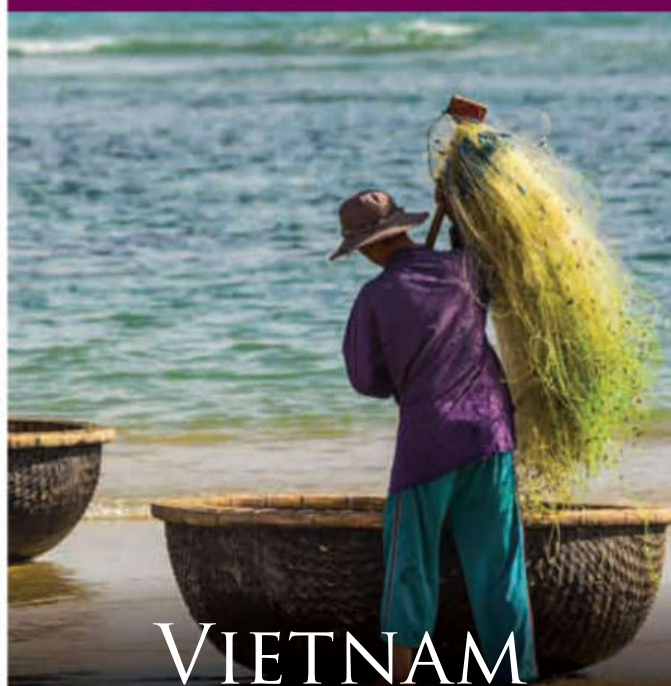
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Dangerous dales?
The Pennines are picture-perfect, just look out for cows...

‘I like being in a country where when cows attack word gets around. That’s what I mean when I say Britain is cosy’

◀ her pocket – and they still trampled her. More recently, a retired university lecturer named Mike Porter was trampled to death by an angry herd – yes, angry – in a field near the Kennet and Avon Canal in Wiltshire, a place where I had been walking only the year before. ‘It looked like they wanted to kill him,’ one eyewitness breathlessly told the *Daily Telegraph*. It was the fourth serious attack on walkers in five years just by this one herd.

Now what, you may reasonably wonder, does this have to do with Britain being the right size for a country? Well, stick with me, please. A couple of weeks later I was in Colorado, visiting my son Sam who works in Vail, when I happened to read an article in the *Denver Post* about a man named Dexter Lewis who had been convicted of going into a bar called Fero’s just before closing time, ordering the bartender and four remaining customers to lie down and then killing them in cold blood as part of a robbery. Now if anyone did anything on that scale in England, it would be front page news across the nation the next morning. But in America a gruesome murder in Denver is unlikely to be news in Memphis or Detroit or anywhere outside Colorado. Those places have murders of their own to be preoccupied with. It wasn’t a particularly big article even in the *Denver Post*.

This is when it occurred to me that the issue here is not how often bad things happen, but how often they are reported, which is quite a different matter, of course. In America, a cow trampling would never make the national news other than in highly exceptional circumstances. If, let’s say, Dick Cheney was trampled to death by cows (and we can always dream), that would be national

news. But if it was just some guy walking his dog in Sodom, Indiana, no one outside Indiana – probably no one outside Sodom County – would hear about it. There could be a national epidemic of cow trappings and no one would know it because the news wouldn’t travel far enough for trends to become apparent. But in Britain if a single cow tramples a walker anywhere in the country, it will almost certainly make headlines. The story of the veterinarian killed in Yorkshire was reported in all the national newspapers except the *Daily Star*, and I am guessing that that was only because the people at the *Star* couldn’t spell veterinarian.

I like being in a country where when cows attack word of it gets around. That’s what I mean when I say Britain is cosy. It is a nice quality for a country to have. The only downside is that it means Britons are frightened of things that are never going to happen to them. Cow attacks are actually quite rare. That’s what makes them news when they happen. But because people read about cow attacks at regular intervals, they perceive them as being common.

As an experiment, I asked several British friends this question: ‘What are the chances if you are walking in a field with cows that the cows will attack you?’ Every one of them grew instantly animated, and said something along the lines of ‘Actually, surprisingly good. I read about it in the papers. It happens far more often than you’d expect.’

Ask the same question of an American and he would say: ‘Why would I be in a field with cows?’ 🐮

Extracted from *The Road to Little Dribbling* by Bill Bryson published by Doubleday at £20. Copyright © Bill Bryson 2015

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and lightweight, they are easy to carry; they also have powerful optics and a wide field of view, ideal for glimpsing hard-to-spot wildlife in enclosed forest areas – such as the tigers of India's Ranthambore National Park perhaps. Also, one of the Swarovision's niftiest features is that you can connect them to your iPhone 5/5S or 6 and capture those wonderful wildlife close-ups on camera to share with your friends at home.

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People say two pairs of eyes are better than one. So next time you're planning a trip, pack a pair of Swarovski binoculars – your 'second eyes' – so you won't miss a thing.



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■ **This month's experts include:** Family flyer Lesley-ann Rosenberg p73 ♦
Master motorbiker Henry Cole, p74 ♦ Iceland ace Laura Dixon, p74 ♦ Dedicated
cameraman David Yarrow, p76 ♦ Midlayer maestro Phoebe Smith, p81 ♦

Stay in a windmill!
Accommodation listing sites can help you swap a hotel room for something a bit more unusual



■ The *Wanderlust* Masterclass

How to stay Airbnb-style

Travel can be expensive. And accommodation can be one of the costliest elements, especially in big cities. However, the past few years have seen a revolution in the market, notably a rise in alternatives to traditional hotels, which are offered by websites such as Airbnb. Such companies allow anyone to list their property – be it spare room, flat, whole house, castle or igloo – which opens up a whole new range of options. These private rentals are often cheaper than hotels, and can offer a personal touch – you might end up with a list of tips from your host,

or access to their DVD collection. But do you really get a bargain? Or is it too good to be true?

What is it?

Online accommodation marketplaces allow people with spare space to advertise it to people looking for a place to stay. That ‘spare space’ could be a sofa or an entire island. The industry leader is Airbnb, which has become nothing short of a phenomenon since it launched in 2008. It now lists 1.5 million places to stay, across over 190 countries and 34,000 cities. However, there are several competitors sites out there, including HouseTrip, GuestHouser, HomeAway and others.

Of course, these marketplaces work both ways. If you have a room or property to rent, you can list it online. You’ll need to create a personal profile, so guests can see who you are and who they might be staying with. Note, hosts have the final call on potential lodgers and can decline your booking if they don’t like the look of you.

What’s the draw?

This new type of accommodation is so popular because it can be so much cheaper than a regular hotel, and can offer so much more. “Often you can rent a whole property for half the price of a hotel room,” explains

'People remember these trips more than any others because of the people they meet and the authentic experience they gained— they open up local districts and stories'

Lola Meissonnier from housetrip.com. "Instead of being cramped in a small room or having lots of restrictions on where you stay and what time breakfast is served, you get to choose."

Also, the choice is bewildering: there really is something for everyone. There are plenty of cheap and cheerful options to suit budget travellers while those with more cash can find unique and luxury stays: a bamboo ecolodge in Bali, a restored windmill in Santorini, a castle in Scotland.

Staying with a local is another big draw. "You get the chance to live like a local and truly immerse yourself in the local culture," says James McClure of airbnb.com. "People remember these trips more than any others because of the people they meet and the authentic experience they gained. They open up local districts and stories."

Staying in lodgings like these can certainly have that 'home away from home' feel. But some may not be all that they seem.

Read the reviews

It might sound obvious, but read the reviews of previous lodgers to get a better picture of what your potential accommodation will be like. Most reviews will give you an idea about the place's cleanliness, location and value for money, as well as how easy it was to check-in and communicate with the host.

These reviews are especially important as lodgings are not regularly monitored, so the owner's description may be all you have to go on.

The quality of pictures can also tell you how good a place really is. "If first-timers are worried that a place may be too good to be true, look for verified photos. If our own photographers have been to the listing, we verify the images with a watermark so you can rest easier," explains James.

Also bear in mind that, while many of these accommodation options are low-cost, often, you simply get what you pay for. "Where it's cheap, it can also be grotty," says Noel Josephides, chairman of the Association of British Travel Agents. "You can be lucky or unlucky – there is

no independent rating of the premises and the owner describes it as he or she sees it. There's no check on the accuracy of this description."

Check everything

If you're still unsure about a listing, contact the host with any queries you may have.

Most of the listings websites will also have a customer service team to help provide additional information.

"As you do your research on the property, have a look at what the host has to say to see if it meets your needs. Don't be afraid to ask if you're unsure of anything," says Lola.

It's worth checking to see if the property is keeping on the right side of the law as well. As most accommodation on these sites is not licensed, there is no requirement for the host to conform to any fire, health or safety measures.

Some cities have been cracking down on people listing their properties. For instance, New York has imposed a law that makes it illegal to rent out an apartment for less than a month, when the owner is not there. However, NYC listings are still rife.

Enjoy the experience

Staying in someone's flat, mansion or canal boat is not like staying in a big, faceless hotel. This is the biggest attraction, so embrace the unique experience. If your host is in at the time of your stay too, you'll also have a gateway to lots of handy tips and recommendations. Also, it's important to remember that, with such a wide range of lodgings on offer, you'll not have the same experience twice.

"Whether it's a short break in Paris or a family trip to Mallorca, the experience is great," says Lola. "I like experimenting with different types of places and seeing what bottle of wine the host has left me!"

So, leave that pushed-together 'double bed' and start thinking about a barge, a converted train carriage or a local's cosy home instead. With a bit of careful consideration, you can instantly stretch out your accommodation options... and your budget too.

Case study

JULIA HAMMOND

The *Wanderlust* reader shares her tips on how to have a happy Airbnb stay



Why did you choose to stay in this type of accommodation?

I went to stay in Jacmel, Haiti, but there was

a lack of available regular hotels at an affordable price: it was the time of the annual carnival so all the hotels had pushed their prices up.

How did you find the experience?

It was an interesting experiment.

I found it less satisfactory in terms of liaising with the owner, who wasn't on site much. Being slightly out of town with no food options on site or nearby meant it wasn't as good as a B&B would have been. It was a shame the owner wasn't there much as I didn't get to chat about his country or lifestyle. However, the accommodation itself was great: clean, with a sea view. It was a bargain.

What advice would you give to first-timers?

If things aren't as they seem it's much harder to get them put right while you're away. For instance, I'd expected to be able to get some dinner on the first night, as this was suggested in the place's listing. However, the owner wasn't there when I arrived and the young girl who was had no idea what I was asking as I didn't speak French. When the owner did return, it turned out I could have pre-booked food but had to give a day's notice – not easy on my first night. It wasn't a disaster, but unlike at a hotel, you're sometimes on your own if there's a lack of communication. It's really about expectations; you need to be realistic.

Any other tips?

Ask lots of questions. My unit had a shared bathroom, which wasn't obvious from the details; as it was between two rooms, it made my room less secure. This isn't a hotel or guesthouse experience so don't expect it to be so. Also, make sure you have clear directions; my place wasn't signed at all so was hard to find without lots of help from the villagers. 📍

TOP TIP

Before you get there, build up a rapport with your host through online messaging. You might get extra tips, advice and maybe the odd freebie...

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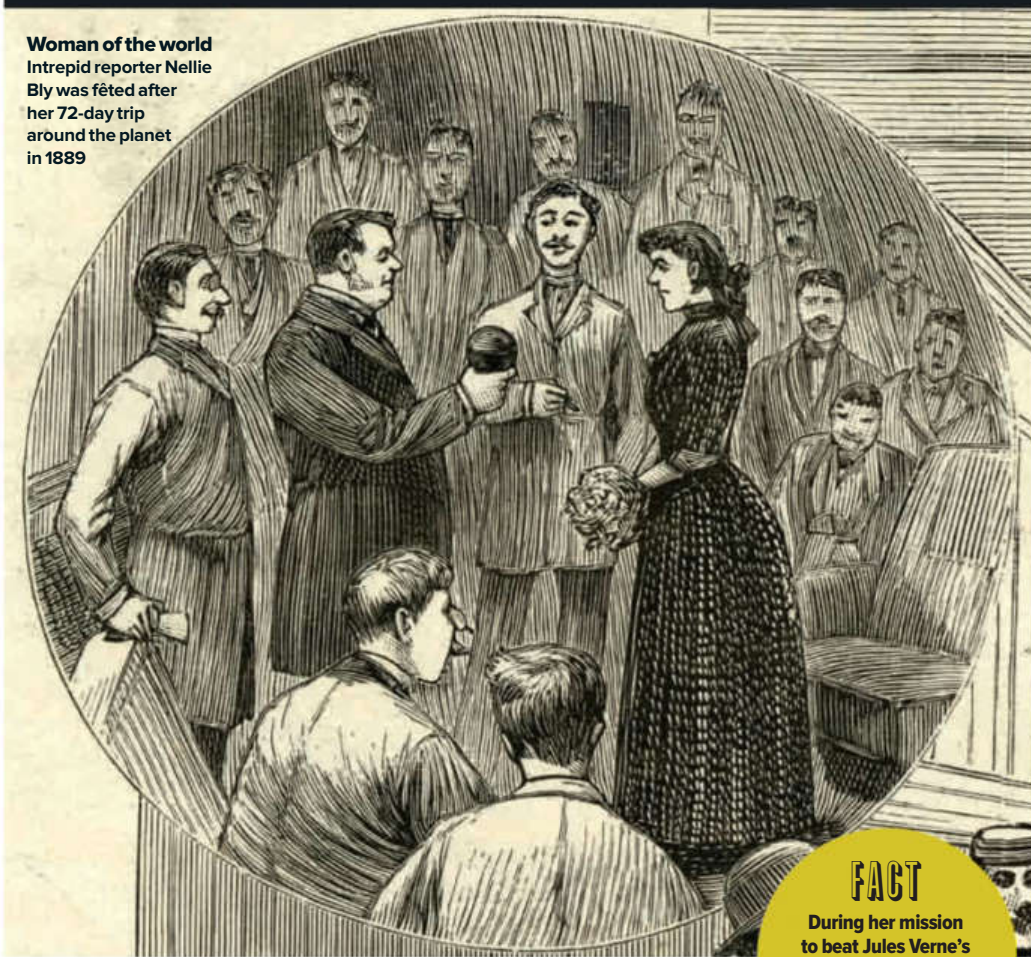
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Woman of the world
Intrepid reporter Nellie
Bly was fêted after
her 72-day trip
around the planet
in 1889



FACT

During her mission to beat Jules Verne's character's time, she met the author himself at his home in Amiens, France.

■ Instant Expert

Nellie Bly

Remind me, who was she?

Elizabeth Cochrane – widely known by her pen name, Nellie Bly – was a renowned journalist in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Fresh after the publication of her article exposing conditions in a New York asylum, she persuaded her editor at *New York World*, Joseph Pulitzer, to let her try to emulate Phileas Fogg's journey in Jules Verne's novel *Around the World in Eighty Days*. She set off on 14 November 1889.

Her attempt inspired rival magazine *Cosmopolitan* to send its own reporter, Elizabeth Bisland, the opposite way around the planet to try to beat Nellie to it.

Wow. Did she succeed?

Yes. Starting from New York (instead of London's Reform Club, like Fogg), she made the journey in just 72 days – then, a world record. At a time when travelling alone as a female was unheard of, she even beat her own target of 75 days. Her rival finished four and a half days later, after missing a connection across the Atlantic.

Amazing. Did she inspire more people to travel?

She returned to New York to be greeted like a hero; there was a celebratory parade, and a song, board game and even a fashion line were created in her name. Her record didn't last long though. A few months later George Train whipped around the globe in 67 days. By 1913 that mark had been lowered to 36 days.

Six years after her voyage, Nellie retired from journalism, aged 31. She went into manufacturing, and died of pneumonia in 1922, aged 57. She's buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx.

How can I remember her legacy?

If you haven't got the time to cover the globe in 72 days, why not tread one part of Nellie's trip? Try her train journeys from either Kandy to Colombo in Sri Lanka, or from French Amiens to Brindisi in Italy, or take a hike up Victoria Peak in Hong Kong. For some armchair travel, buy her book *Around the World in 72 Days*.

■ 5-step guide to...

FLYING LONG-HAUL WITH CHILDREN

1 Know that flight crew love children. I was really dreading how staff – and other passengers – would react to my son. But the attendants made sure we had everything we needed and went out of their way to be friendly to him, making sure he enjoyed his flight.

2 You can never have too many books. Or colouring pencils. Or games. Yes, kids can watch films and play video games but when they get bored of those there's still time to fill. Take as many books/pads/toys as you can carry. Also, there may be only a few children's films onboard, so load your tablet with your own collection to avoid the temptation of the age-inappropriate offerings.

3 Watch out for soft drink overload. Keep an eye on how much your kids consume. Flight staff are constantly walking up the aisles offering drinks; your children will think of it as a Nandos all-you-can-drink soda fountain!

4 Give them plenty of water. It might mean a few extra trips to the bathroom but avoids them becoming dehydrated and grumpy.

5 Take a break. Consider splitting a long-haul flight with a stopover. En route to Australia, we made an overnight stop in Bangkok, staying at a hotel near the airport, which meant we had a night's sleep in a proper bed. My son was too excited to sleep on the plane. 

Tips from primary school teacher Lesley-ann Rosenberg, who flew Brisbane to London with her 11-year-old. For more family travel advice see www.wanderlust.co.uk

ASK THE EXPERTS

The varied terrain of Venezuela; Iceland in four nights; motorbiking for beginners; the latest news on Ebola; cycling inspirations – our experts put you in the know...

THE EXPERTS



HENRY COLE

Presenter of *World's Greatest Motorcycle Rides*, Travel Channel (Tuesdays from 3 November, 9pm)



LAURA DIXON

Author of Footprint's *Reykjavik Handbook* and *Focus Iceland* guides (footprinttravelguides.com)



BEN BOX

Co-author of Footprint's *Venezuela* (footprinttravelguides.com)



NICKY SLADE

Editor of the new *Cyclist's Anthology*; (trailblazer-guides.com)

Q When is the best time to visit Venezuela? I'd like to see the Gran Sabana and the Caribbean coast, and some wildlife too.

Helen Terry, by email

A The main attraction of the Gran Sabana is the magnificent landscape of table-top mountains (*tepui*s), waterfalls (including Angel Falls) and huge skies. Many trips go to Angel Falls (some are just an overflight) and its neighbouring camp at Canaima, but there are other options to small communities. The wildlife is limited, except on the tepuis, which, while not having the dinosaurs of Conan Doyle's *Lost World*, are a world apart and a challenge to reach – Mount Roraima is the prime example.

The best time to go is after the May-September rainy season while there is still water in the falls. Boat trips to Angel Falls run May-January. Combining the Gran Sabana and eastern Caribbean beaches (Paria Peninsula, Parque Nacional Mochima or Isla Margarita) is easy by bus or plane. The coastal weather is hot, semi-arid in places and wettest June-December.

If you want wildlife, Los Llanos is the place, although it's very seasonally dependent. November to May are the dry months. October-November, after the rains, are best for wildlife spotting, when the plains are still partially flooded. **Ben Box, author of Footprint's Venezuela (2nd edition)**

Q I'm an inexperienced motorbiker but like the idea of hitting the open road. Can you suggest a trip that would suit a biking novice?

Steve Thomas, by email

A I've just finished a ride through the Balkans and was amazed. Slovenia and Croatia are great places to start – the roads are empty and the people fantastic. Croatia is like riding in Italy but without the traffic, and half the price. The coastal riding is safe, the roads are beautiful and the views world-class. Slovenia is akin to Austria but again with empty roads and mind-blowing mountains. You can hire a bike for a self-guided trip or join a tour with kindred spirits – a group will offer help and guidance, and will always ride at a pace that suits you.

The greatest place to ride a motorcycle on tarmac is New Zealand. You can hire a bike or join a tour with ease. The scenery is incredible and the roads are perfection – quiet, no potholes, no nasty gravel bends, virtually no traffic lights.

Remember, if you ride a bike anywhere in the world you are never alone. Bikers will always help a fellow biker. I have never been stranded in over 35 years of riding.

Henry Cole, presenter of World's Greatest Motorcycle Rides on the Travel Channel (Tuesdays from 3 November, 9pm)

Q Everything has gone quiet on Ebola – what is the latest? Is it safe to go back to West Africa?

Steve Hampton, by email

A It is important to keep in mind that Ebola is primarily transmitted to people who are in close contact with those who have died of the disease, especially those who prepare bodies for burial. Healthcare workers are at big risk too. Ordinary travellers are unlikely to contract Ebola.

It is thought that new cases have stopped appearing in the worst hit country, Sierra Leone, and it is heartening to see that cases in the rest of West Africa are also falling fast. This is largely due to better understanding of the importance and power of quarantine, and the fact that people no longer fear being isolated. Travellers may



Perfect parking
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be spectacular

■ Insiders' Guide to...

THE AMAZON



Laura Frost, marketing manager for Exodus Travels (exodus.co.uk) gives us the lowdown on her Amazon experience

TOP MOMENT: From exhilarating night-walks to meeting indigenous locals, even just a couple of days in the Amazon offers extraordinary experiences. Although there were many magic moments, falling asleep to the patter of heavy rain on the trees outside our lodge was quite something.

ACCOMMODATION: Jungle accommodation is fantastic, and really authentic. I shared my lodge with a few harmless critters, but that's all part of being in the jungle. Most lodges are equipped with welly boots for your jungle walks, to save your own boots from being ruined in the rains.

WILDLIFE: Amazon wildlife is so plentiful that it's almost incomprehensible – there are thousands of species to be discovered. Not all will be seen on a short tour but, depending on where you go, you'll likely spot monkeys playing in the trees, a range of hummingbirds and lots of colourful insects and amphibians.

TOP TIPS: If visiting the jungle as part of a longer tour, pack a smaller rucksack that can carry the clothes you need for that shorter time. This will make travelling on the riverboats much easier. Also, always check your welly boots before putting them on – there might be a friendly jungle critter hiding in them!



'New Zealand's scenery is incredible and the roads are perfection – quiet, no potholes, no nasty gravel bends, virtually no traffic lights'

continue to visit West Africa and shouldn't fear Ebola.

Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth,
Wanderlust health guru

Q I'm planning a cross-Europe cycling trip next summer and I'm looking for inspirational reads to keep me motivated. Any ideas?
Stephen Harding, London

A When I began collecting extracts for the cycle-touring chapter of my book, *The Cyclist's Anthology*, I presumed cycle-touring was a relatively recent phenomenon, but quickly discovered that cyclists have been pedalling across Europe since the late 19th century.

One of the earliest was Elizabeth Robins Pennell, who wrote *Over the Alps on a Bicycle* in 1898, eloquently describing how the

effort of cycling up a mountain was amply rewarded by the thrill of the descent. Fast forward half a century and Dervla Murphy was frequently met with amazement on her solo cycle ride (*Full Tilt: Ireland to India with a Bicycle*) – when she declined a lift from an American in a Jeep while cycling on a hot desert road, she was told she was a 'goddam nut-case'!

For fiction, turn to HG Wells' *The Wheels of Chance*, whose hero Mr Hoopdriver ventured off on a cycling holiday almost as soon as he'd taught himself to ride, encountering mystery and intrigue in the process. Or try Jerome K Jerome's *Three Men on the Bummel*, a story of a cycle through Europe, encountering amusing and thoroughly British problems along the way.

Nicky Slade, editor of The Cyclist's Anthology (Trailblazer)

Q I'm visiting Iceland next November. I plan to hire a 4WD to see the Golden Circle, Skaftafell and the Blue Lagoon, spending one night at Hotel Ranga, three in Reykjavík. Is five days enough?

T Robertson, by email

A Your itinerary should fit into the time you have. The main thing to be aware of is the limited daylight in November – it's light roughly 9am-5pm. Also there may be snow, which might hinder you, though roads to popular sights are usually kept clear.

Perhaps tweak your plan: spend two nights in Reykjavík, two nights at Ranga. Skaftafell ice caves are a three-hour drive from Ranga so just one night there limits your chances of exploring. Include a visit to Jokulsarlon, a glacial lagoon beside Skaftafell.

Hotel Ranga has outside hot tubs and could be the place to spot the northern lights. The lights aren't predictable; with four nights in the country, you have a good chance but it's possible that it will be cloudy and they won't be visible.

The Blue Lagoon can be squeezed into your final day. It's close to Keflavik airport, so add it into your route home to save time; plan to spend two to three hours there.

That leaves the Golden Circle, traditionally: Gullfoss waterfall, Thingvellir National Park and Geysir. Thingvellir is the most beautiful – take hiking boots, and plan to spend a few hours. Gullfoss is impressive too, especially in winter when parts of it freeze. Geysir is a series of geysers, but in my opinion, if you're pushed for time, it's the one to drop.
Laura Dixon, author of Footprint's Reykjavik Handbook ■

TAKE BETTER TRAVEL PHOTOS



Photographer

David Yarrow

explains how

to capture a perfect wildlife moment - like this

This image of a giraffe running into the sunset in Kenya's Amboseli National Park – I call it 'Heaven Can Wait' – is a hard-earned and timeless photograph. It has soul, a sense of place, a sort of biblical countenance.

The dramatic sky appears to be in communication with the giraffe on the flat dustpan below. Indeed, there is diagonal connectivity across the whole image as the dust tracks of the giraffe lead the eye to the animal, which then takes the eye to the sky. The image conveys the arid and elemental habitat that is Lake Amboseli at the end of the dry season.

While I was certainly lucky to get this cloud formation at peak evening light, I fought hard to capture this shot, and there was much trial and error over the previous few days. To take this image, I worked against the light and used a wide-angle rather than telephoto lens. To get as close to the ground as possible, in a jeep driving at 30mph on a dry, crusty lake, was challenging. I hung from a harness and shot blind, arm outstretched downwards. This was a low-percentage shot. But it came off. 📷

David Yarrow is a Nikon Ambassador (nikon.co.uk). See davidyarrow.photography

1 Go low

Try to be as low to the ground as possible. Pictures taken above an animal's line of sight suggest an artificial encounter. Get the camera – and indeed yourself – dirty if needs be.

2 Go offbeat

Visit places where you can get out of the vehicle and be creative. Don't go where everyone else is: what's the point?

3 Avoid long lenses

Long lenses are better for sport than wildlife; telephotos offer stock images, but not immersion and soul. Remember what Robert Capa said: if the picture's not good enough, you're not close enough. The Nikon 35mm lens is a fantastically sharp prime lens. Use remote controls if the animal is dangerous. Also, use a body with a fast motor drive – vital to enable you to take multiple photos per second.



TOP TIP

Rules should be flexible. When you're shooting in the wild, not a studio, it is often better to just go with the flow, think spontaneously and break rules.

4 Be patient

Good results may not come on day one, or even day two. Look at your early results and then learn. Go back and try again, employing what you have learned.

5 Work against light

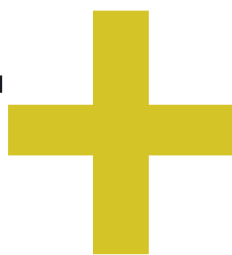
Working with the light is a little dull. To get pictures that have 'wow factor' almost always means shooting into the light.





TRAVEL CLINIC

with Doctor Jane



Tales from the tropics

Who doesn't want to go to South-East Asia? Just be aware of the health risks. **Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth** tells three travellers' stories, so you can learn from their mistakes...

Three travellers to Thailand; three different tales of woe. It's a great country to visit — and most visitors have no problems at all — but here's what can go wrong, and how to avoid these nasties yourself.

CASE 1: Bargain travel insurance

A patient in his 20s consulted me. He had been travelling through Asia for ten months and wondered if he needed any special tests. He had no symptoms but told me that he'd been very ill in Thailand. He had developed a severe headache, high fever and then felt as if his bones were 'fracturing'.

Feeling awful and scared, he'd found a private clinic in Bangkok where dengue fever was diagnosed. He then discovered that his 'very good' travel insurance (which cost considerably less than that of

his fellow travellers) did not cover private health care.

He then presented himself to a public hospital. They didn't have a bed for him. Instead he was offered monitoring in Out Patients, with blood testing on alternate days. Over the next week or so, he languished alone in his hostel and attended the public clinic as advised.

Fortunately the tests were reassuring and he didn't develop any complications. He did, however, feel miserable and alone during his illness. He recovered completely in about ten days, and continued his travels. The small cost of the tests amounted to less than the £25 excess on the travel insurance.

WHAT WAS THE CULPRIT?

This chap hadn't known much about dengue fever before he was taken ill, despite it being increasingly common in Asia. Indeed, the first recorded epidemic of dengue was in Bangkok in 1953. The United States Centers for Disease Control

says there are now around 100 million cases globally each year; of these 500,000 are of the more serious and potentially fatal haemorrhagic form, with around 22,000 deaths. This particular traveller was unaware of the importance of avoiding bites during daylight hours (dawn to dusk), which is the key to avoiding dengue.

Four to ten days after a bite from an *Aedes* mosquito (which have stripy legs), the victim develops fever and aches. In a minority of cases the disease becomes haemorrhagic (when blood clotting mechanisms fail) so that two to four days later easy bruising and bleeding gums herald deterioration. Around 10% of people who suffer from the haemorrhagic form die. Fortunately, such progression is extraordinarily rare in people brought up in Europe and other non-dengue regions.

MORAL OF THE STORY...

It is common for people to feel scared and alone if something

goes wrong when far from home. Costlier insurance would probably have seen this patient tucked up in a comfortable private hospital bed with good food and reassuring nurses.

CASE 2: The bad beach itches

Another patient, a 30-something woman, presented to me with a distressingly itchy rash across the top of her chest and on her forearms. Her problems had started after a few days relaxing on the beach in Thailand. She'd sunbathed on a towel but was





TOP TIPS

- ◆ Thailand and much of South-East Asia can seem well organised but there is still some risk of tropical diseases
- ◆ Protect yourself from bites both night and day
- ◆ Vegetarian food is often very good and is considerably safer than meat dishes
- ◆ Food cooked to order is likely to be safer than food from a buffet

CASE 3: Chicken sausages

A traveller checked into a reasonable hotel in Thailand, and got stuck into its breakfast buffet (especially the chicken sausages). Around 36 hours later he started to feel unwell: achy all over, very sweaty, high fever. An hour later he developed abdominal cramps and spent the next 12 hours on the toilet.

WHAT WAS THE CULPRIT?

High fever and sudden onset of diarrhoea point to bacillary dysentery, which causes a profuse out-pouring (up to 20 times in 24 hours). Treatment is lots of sugary or savoury drinks.

This victim managed to buy nalidixic acid; a short course of this antibiotic probably helped. Profuse diarrhoea with blood or fever (over 38.5°C) suggests dysentery and is best treated with an antibiotic. Some travel with ciprofloxacin but this is less effective in Asia these days. I favour new xifaxanta.

Note, it is vital to hydrate yourself well – it is dehydration (rather than the microbes themselves) that harms.

MORAL OF THE STORY...

Hotels in the tropics may look hygienic but heat spoils food quickly; buffets can be risky. 📌

Jane Wilson-Howarth *always* travels insured; wilson-howarth.com

'I froze the heads of the larval tapeworms that were under her skin – the itching settled within hours'

convinced that something had bitten her on the beach. She consulted a dermatologist in Bangkok who gave her some pills, which didn't help. She then went home, where another dermatologist saw her, took a biopsy and also didn't cure her.

Her skin was so badly scratched it was impossible to make a diagnosis but a few days on a hefty anti-inflammatory

medicine suppressed the itch and revealed several sinuous red flaky lines. I froze the heads of the larval tapeworms that were under her skin. The itching settled within hours.

WHAT WAS THE CULPRIT?

This affliction comes from lying or sitting on sand or soil that has been contaminated by dog or cat faeces. Tapeworm eggs

hatch on sensing a warm-blooded host and penetrate the skin. They never travel into the gut so cause no long-term problems, but the itching they cause is severe, distressing and causes insomnia and sometimes secondary infection.

MORAL OF THE STORY...

Tapeworms are less likely to survive in thoroughly sun-baked sand whereas a shady spot is likely to be a higher risk. Cutaneous larva migrans (CLM) is quite common in hot, tropical regions including Asia and also the Caribbean.

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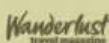
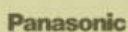
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■ Traveller's Guide To...

MIDLAYERS

It must keep you warm (but not sweaty), fit over baselayers, under outer layers, stretch when you need *and* look good. Phew! We help you pick a mighty mid...

WHAT IS A MIDLAYER?

'Midlayer' is a broad term. It can encompass everything from technical fleeces (often Polartec), to merino-wool tops, to jackets with down panels and water- or wind-resistant materials. Decide what you need your midlayer to do – no one midlayer does everything well. This test focuses on midlayers that offer a good level of warmth at a light weight – perfect for wearing under a waterproof in cold climates or as a stand-alone jacket on chilly nights in warmer countries.

FABRIC

Can look super sporty or more lifestyle/casual - it's down to personal choice but for travel something you can wear during outdoor activities and down to the pub afterwards gives you more versatility.

HOOD

Not all midlayers have hoods. A good hood will help keep you warm – but needs to fit your head well to stop warm air escaping.

DRAUGHT EXCLUDERS

Look for a midlayer that's close fitting, with elasticated cuffs or thumb loops to help keep heat in. Make sure the waist hem isn't too generous – you'll lose heat here too. Some midlayers have a draught excluder (a panel of fabric behind the main zip) that helps keep cold air out.

FIT

Try before you buy, to ensure a good fit. 'Unisex' models are often designed for men; ladies, look for women-specific midlayers if available. Athletic-fit jackets sit closer to the body and usually offer a good length (keeping your lower back warm); looser jackets can be worn over more layers.

POCKETS

This layer is primarily about warmth so pockets might be irrelevant – you might not want or need them. Conversely, you might decide you want quick-access zip-free pockets for warming your hands. Or you might want a zipped pocket that will keep your camera or smartphone safe.

WEIGHT

A lightweight midlayer is luggage-friendly but might be less warm or have fewer features (pockets, draught excluders etc). Try each midlayer on to feel which is warmer. If you plan to be very active, pick a midlayer that allows a good range of movement, isn't too bulky and is made from a breathable fabric.



Midlayers

We test out your essential travel kit, so you don't have to...

EDZ

Microfleece Midlayer £30

The test: At the budget end of the scale is this no-nonsense microfleece from EDZ. There's no draught excluder behind the full-length zip, but the fit is nice and close to keep you warm (though sleeves are a little less tapered than on the pricier models). There are two non-zip pockets to keep hands warm. Considering its weight – 212g (women's size 10), second-lightest here – it's a fine, luggage-friendly option that works well to keep you

warm, without fancy extra features.

IN BRIEF

Design: ★★★★★
Features: ★★★★★
Comfort: ★★★★★
Versatility: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★
edzlayering.com



DIDRIKSONS

Trail Halfzip £45

The test: For a bit more cash you get a fleece that features stretchy panels (with warming microgrid design inside) in key areas where you sweat, such as the back and underarms – great if you're very active. It's a half-zip (with draught excluder) pull-over design. The high collar is good for keeping in heat, as are the tapered cuffs (with extra thumb loops). There's a zipped chest pocket. The one niggle is that the seams aren't flatlocked. Weighing

305g (women's 10), it's the sixth heaviest.

IN BRIEF

Design: ★★★★★
Features: ★★★★★
Comfort: ★★★★★
Versatility: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★
didriksons.com



REGATTA Willowbrook / Cartersville £55 / £60

The test: If you want something with a more cardigan-like look (women's version at least, the men's is more sporty) then this knit-style full zip top (with draught excluder) is an option. With stretch panels under the arms and down the sides, a lycra-bonded waist, cuffs and hood, it works hard to keep you toasty. There are two zipped pockets that are vented rather than lined, which adds weight – at 402g (women's 10), it's the heaviest on

test. The seams aren't flatlocked.

IN BRIEF

Design: ★★★★★
Features: ★★★★★
Comfort: ★★★★★
Versatility: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★
regatta.com



SHERPA

Sita / Ananta Pullover £80 / £99

The test: For something a little different there's this zip-free offering from Sherpa. Featuring a chimney-style high collar (hood for the men's) and narrow sleeves, it's great for keeping heat in when in cooler climes; but, as there's no zip, it would be harder to let heat out if the temperature rises. It's made from a quick-dry, breathable fabric that's 53% recycled. It has a more everyday, less technical look, making it a versatile option.

At 270g (women's 10), it's fifth lightest on test.

IN BRIEF

Design: ★★★★★
Features: ★★★★★
Comfort: ★★★★★
Versatility: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★
sherpaadventuregear.co.uk



BLACK DIAMOND

CoEfficient Jacket £120

The test: Cross the £100 threshold and you start to notice different fabrics. This one feels like fleece inside but the outer is more robust, courtesy of Polartec Power Dry, a quick-drying and breathable material. A streamlined design, it has no pockets (on the women's version; there's a small chest pocket on the men's). There is a full zip (no draught excluder). The cuffs are great, being stretchy and close fitting. All seams are flatlocked for comfort. It's 268g

(women's 10), making it fourth lightest on test.

IN BRIEF

Design: ★★★★★
Features: ★★★★★
Comfort: ★★★★★
Versatility: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★
blackdiamondequipment.com



PÁRAMO

Ventura / Enduro £135 / £145

The test: This looks more lifestyle than techy but the velvety fabric is treated with Nikwax so is water repellent. Cut close, it's still fairly loose, particularly around the waist and cuffs, which has the potential to let heat escape. It has a half-zip design, with a draught excluder. Seams aren't flatlocked but have been moved to avoid rubbing. The women's version has a kangaroo pocket (for warming hands); the men's has two chest pockets. At

368g (women's 10), it's third heaviest here.

IN BRIEF

Design: ★★★★★
Features: ★★★★★
Comfort: ★★★★★
Versatility: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★
paramo-clothing.com





How we did the test...

We asked gear manufacturers to submit fleece or merino-style midlayers that they felt were most suitable for travellers – those versatile enough to wear for both physical activities and general travel. Our editor, Phoebe Smith, took the 20 we were sent out on the road to see which performed best. All are available in men's and women's specific fits, with different names/prices indicated. Our Value Buy and overall Best Buy are shown.

Wanderlust
VALUE
BUY

SPRAYWAY

Carina / Cerberus £60

The test: This is a classic hooded fleece. There's a full zip, but no draught excluder; however, the lycra bonded and tapered waist means less heat loss. The best features are the cuffs – the inner, stretchy sleeve with integrated thumb loops provides the closest fit of all the cuffs on test. The hood also fits well and is lycra bonded at the rim to keep you warm. There are two zipped pockets, lined for warmth, and the fabric is quick-dry. It weighs

271g (women's 10), sixth lightest here.

IN BRIEF

Design: ★★★★★

Features: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Versatility: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

sprayway.com



ARC'TERYX

Delta LT £60

The test: If weight is your key concern, you can't do better than the Delta. At 182g (women's 10), it's the lightest midlayer here, but doesn't skimp on features, made from a fast-drying and breathable fabric, and offering a close fit and narrowed cuffs to keep heat in. It has a half-zip pull-over design (no draught excluder). It has no pockets, which keeps the weight down and makes it a good option for wearing underneath a waterproof

jacket. The seams are all flatlocked for comfort.

IN BRIEF

Design: ★★★★★

Features: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Versatility: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

arcteryx.com



ROHAN

Microgrid Stowaway £70

The test: Add an extra tenner and you get another full-length close-fit zip fleece (no draught excluder), this time with a nice, comfortable chinguard and two zip pockets that are vented for breathability. These add weight, but not excessively – at 248g (women's 10), this is third lightest. Impressive, as there's also an extra hidden, internal security pocket and thumb loops for keeping in heat (though they made the sleeves a little short).

Shame the seams aren't flatlocked.

IN BRIEF

Design: ★★★★★

Features: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Versatility: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

rohan.co.uk



SMARTWOOL

Corbett 120 £145

The test: Mixing merino wool and panels filled with synthetic down, this midlayer insures your core stays warm while your arms have more flexibility – great if you're active. There's a full zip with generous draught excluder and two zipped pockets for warming hands. The fit is good overall, being close and a good length, though the cuffs aren't as tapered as some and the seams aren't all flatlocked. At 327g it's fourth heaviest but

you do get more insulation.

IN BRIEF

Design: ★★★★★

Features: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Versatility: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

smartwool.com



ICEBREAKER

Cascade / Sierra £160

The test: Also made from merino wool (a great breathable and wicking fabric), and with a touch of lycra for stretch (good if you're active), this features a full-length zip with a generous draught excluder. There are two zipped pockets and a high chest pocket too (placement OK for women). It's a good longer length and offers a close fit to keep heat in, though the cuffs aren't as tapered as others here. At 325g it's fifth heaviest here, but does

offer good warmth for less bulk.

IN BRIEF

Design: ★★★★★

Features: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Versatility: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

uk.icebreaker.com



PATAGONIA

R3 Hoody £170

The test: Yes, it is pricey – but then this is two jackets in one. Made from warm but breathable and quick-drying Polartec High Loft fleece, it's reversible: wear it pile side out when it's hotter, smooth side out when it's cooler making it very versatile. It has a full zip (no draught excluder, on account of the above), hand-warming pockets and one zip pocket. The hood, cuffs and waist feature binding to keep in warmth. All this adds weight – at 375g

(women's 10) it's the second heaviest here.

IN BRIEF

Design: ★★★★★

Features: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Versatility: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

patagonia.com



Wanderlust
BEST
BUY



The tile-high club
The tiled dome of
Isfahan's Shah
mosque reaches
for the sky



GLITTERING FUTURE?

With travel restrictions easing, Iran's sites and valleys are opening up to visitors. We glimpse a country that may be on the verge of change

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS **NICK BOULOS**



The fortune-teller mused for a moment – before fluttering its lime green wings and lowering its beak towards the pieces of paper crammed into the tiny box. A lilac-coloured slip scrawled with Farsi was eventually selected, and retrieved by the bushy-haired man clutching the all-knowing bird. The clairvoyant budgie had spoken. “You are bold and you are wise but you are lost,” the missive read. “Travel and prayer will guide the way.”

Stood in the middle of Shiraz under a twilight sky, watching young and old clamber to touch the tomb of the great 14th-century poet Hafez, I felt that my prayers had already been answered.

Iran is a place of great beauty and immense history; indeed, during the days of Cyrus the Great, around 500 BC, the Persian Empire ruled a vast chunk of the globe. However, more latterly dogged by troublesome neighbours, war, sanctions, a questionable nuclear programme and plenty of negative propaganda, Iran has long been out of bounds. Some would have you believe it's little more than a land of terrorists, atomic bombs and fanatics who storm embassies; that it's a country left out in the cold for good reason. But with perceptions changing, a new nuclear agreement on the cards and the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office

easing travel restrictions, change is afoot. Iran is on the cusp of becoming the world's hottest destination.

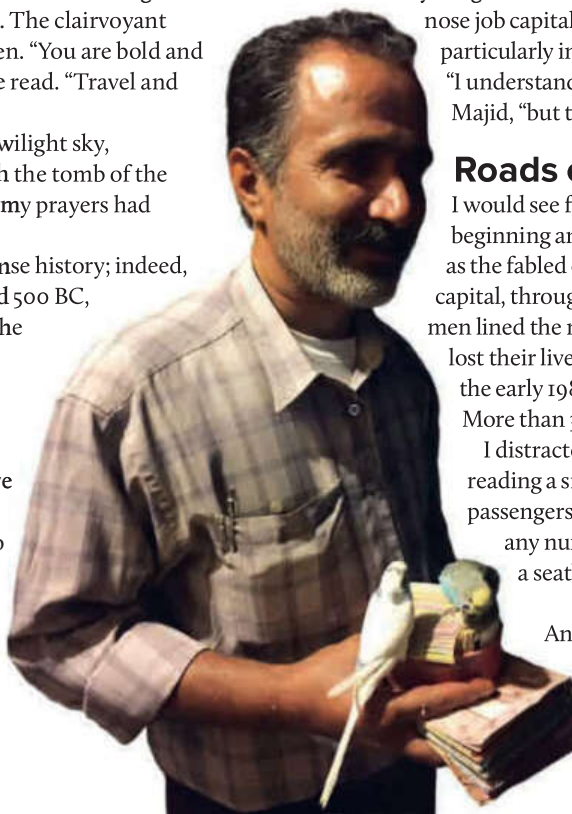
“Iran is badly represented,” said my guide Majid Maddah as we negotiated the sea of women in Tehran's sprawling central bazaar. Each had their heads covered, as all women must in Iran. Older ladies clutched their billowing *chadors* (full-length gowns) while some of the younger ones had bandages on their noses (Tehran is the nose job capital of the world). Image is everything, particularly in a country as misconstrued as Iran. “I understand why people are scared to come,” said Majid, “but the reality is quite different.”

Roads of remembrance

I would see for myself. I was making a two-week loop, beginning and ending in Tehran, heading south as far as the fabled city of Shiraz. As we sped from the capital, through tiny towns, sombre photos of young men lined the roads: some of the one million or so who lost their lives in the eight-year Iran/Iraq conflict in the early 1980s, when Saddam Hussein invaded. More than 3,000 villages were blown to pieces.

I distracted myself from such uneasy thoughts by reading a sign on the bus window instructing passengers to text a number if the driver committed any number of offences: text 1 for not wearing a seatbelt; 3 for driving erratically; 6 for failing or times.

An unexpected downpour in the quiet town of Nain meant our picnic lunch was enjoyed within the ►





The market is open
(clockwise from this)
Nightfall at the central
bazaar in Isfahan; the
fortune-telling budgies
of Shiraz; celebrating
the anniversary of
Islamic Revolution
(11 Feb) in front of the
Azadi Monument





Life & death in Iran
(clockwise from this)
The Amir Chakhmaq
Complex in Yazd;
saffron flowers growing
in the countryside;
a young girl in
a mountain village
outside Tehran; a Tower
of Silence – used by
Zoroastrians for
exposing the dead to
the local vultures

‘Tourists are a novelty. A stroll through any given bazaar, mosque or Persian palace will result in glances, smiles, photo-requests and conversations’

◀ old stone walls of the local mosque – the second-oldest in Iran. At around 1,000 years old, it had an understated elegance, its bare brick walls etched with ornate carvings and Arabic scriptures scrawled across the crumbling archways.

Tourist-free zone

The cosmopolitan town of Yazd lies 500km south-east of Tehran. On its outskirts stand two hilltop monuments: the Towers of Silence. In days gone by, Zoroastrians would leave the remains of their dearly departed in these towers to be eaten by vultures. Food for thought as a sandstorm swept in, gathering force with gusty gales that sprinted down Yazd's streets. Outside the Haj Khalifeh Ali Rahbar sweet shop, where treats like *qotab* and *sohan ardi* filled the shelves, the air swirled with dust and the smell of almonds and rosewater.

I opted out of visiting the dull-sounding Water Museum and instead stole a few quiet moments outside the Amir Chakhmaq Complex, which contains a mosque, *caravanserai* and bathhouse and is famed for its twin minarets and rows of sunken alcoves across three floors. The solitude didn't last long. A young man wandered over and fired off questions like an Iranian Jeremy Paxman. "Hello Mister, you tourist? You have time to talk to me? What you think of Iran – is it like you see on the news?"

"Yes, yes and absolutely not," were my replies. A smile of pride and relief spread across his face.

Tourists are a novelty in these parts. A stroll through any given bazaar, mosque or Persian palace will result in curious glances, warm smiles, requests for photos and spontaneous conversations. Invitations to take tea or even a homecooked meal are not uncommon. Certainly not the welcome I expected from this 'land of terrorists and extremists' that makes the headlines.

Such generosity also belies how tough things are in Iran. Sanctions over its controversial nuclear programme brought sky-high inflation. The cost of 4g of saffron (Iran is the world's leading producer of the crimson-coloured spice) soared from 1,000 rials (21p) to 300,000 (£6.60) in the space of a month. "It hit people hard," said Majid. "But most agree that the need to defend ourselves is more important."

The valley of nomads

As we continued south, the city of Shiraz beckoned, but the wild Bavanat Valley, peppered with infinite pistachio trees, presented a tempting detour. Our host here for the night was Abbas. The proprietor of a homestay and 'tourist village', his life was considerably different just 15 years ago. "I wasn't happy and God wasn't good to me," he said, almost ashamedly. "I had ►



◀ no money, no cows, nothing. Now, I have a magical business, a car and a garden. Even donkeys.”

He owes it all to a serendipitous encounter with two Germans. They’d broken down, and Abbas offered them a room for the night, sparking a *Dragon’s Den* moment. Thanks to a grant from then-president Ahmadinejad, his empire has since grown from just one room to 33, some traditionally built from adobe and filled with handwoven rugs.

In the square opposite, families pitched tents, set up picnics and crowded around selfie-sticks. But deep in the mountainous valleys beyond, some miles away, other families were hard at work, packing up and preparing for a journey cross-country. Hesmat, in whose tent we had tea, would soon be one of them. Her family is among the 14,000 nomads that continue to live for part of the year in the Bavanat Valley – summers are spent here, winters beside the balmy Persian Gulf. Their ancestors completed the journey on horseback over the course of a month; these days Toyotas do the hard work in as little as five hours.

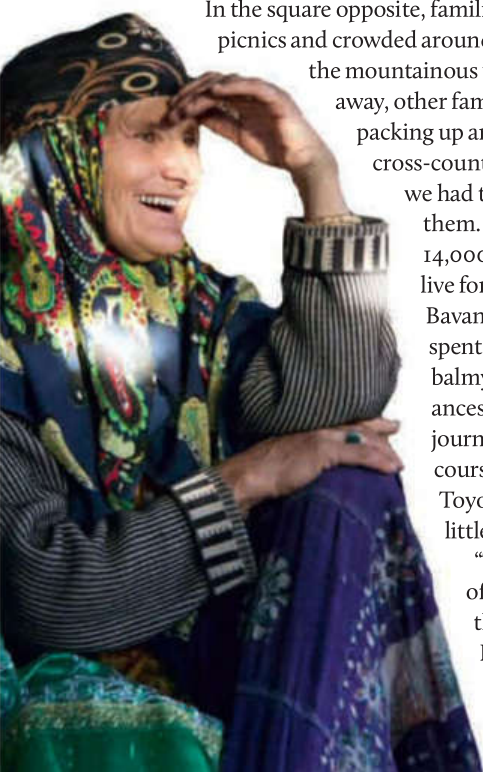
“The most challenging part of our lifestyle are thunderstorms,” said Hesmat, her young

daughters engrossed in intense game of *yeghol dohol*, which involved throwing small stones. “A storm hit once when all the men were out in the mountains. The tent collapsed and it was too heavy to lift because it was so wet.”

It seemed a simple, even primitive, existence but it was clear why these families weren’t keen to swap it for the bright lights of Tehran despite incentives from the government. An hour’s walk took us along gently flowing streams and past fields of drooping sunflowers. We chanced upon another nomadic family and their collection of tipi-style tents. Cue more tea in little glasses, this time courtesy of Mr Abedi, a man with 300 goats, seven children and two wives. But which gives him the most trouble, I asked. Erupting into a fit of giggles, he soon composed himself. “Never my wives,” he laughed, casting a nervous sideways glance to the two Mrs Abedis wrapped up against the chill in neon-pink cardigans. “We are leaving this place soon. Winter is coming and my girls need to get to school.”

After a breakfast of walnuts, cheese and homemade barberry jam, it was time to bid Abbas and his family goodbye. They stood in line, with one of his daughters holding a silver tray laden with various trinkets including a copy of the Quran. One by one, we crouched down and passed beneath it – a traditional ritual designed to bless our forthcoming journey.

A blessing soon materialised in the form of Persepolis: crumbling columns and sculptures built on the slopes of Mount Rahmat that were once the ceremonial capital of the far-reaching Persian Empire. It’s a miracle any of it remains at all. More than 150 years in the making, its foundations were laid by Darius I in the sixth century BC and developed by his successors; it was destroyed almost overnight by a drunken Alexander the Great. For centuries the ruins that survived his wrath sat submerged under the sand,





Falling for Iran
(clockwise from this)
The leaning tower of Shiraz; Hesmat takes a break from packing to serve tea; figures climb the walls of the ancient Persian capital Persepolis

‘Tucked in the depths of the bazaar was the Saray-e-Mehr Teahouse. Persian rugs hung beside tables where locals were pounding piping-hot small clay pots with metal mashers’

forgotten and unknown until 1620. It was almost another 300 years before excavations began in earnest.

The Apadana Palace is the most impressive of Persepolis's sites, particularly the staircase depicting a procession of 23 gift-bearing nations, among them Arabians, Egyptians, Indians and Ethiopians, the latter presenting a baby giraffe to the Shah.

Love, love, love

Next, it was onwards to Shiraz, passing fields where the eponymous wine was once cultivated. Of course there's no chance of a glass these days – Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic revolution of 1979 saw to that.

We arrived at the city's 18th century Arg of Karim Khan. On one corner stood the Leaning Tower of Shiraz, lopsided due to water damage from the hammam inside and lending the citadel a rather comical appearance. Above the main entrance were mosaics depicting Rostham, the Iranian hero who fought cruel kings and killed demons. “Even to this day, many people name their sons Rostham,” said Majid.

Beyond the walls sat sunken gardens of orange trees and old reception rooms that were decorated with 20kg of gold and stained glass windows, which scattered orange, pink and blue sunlight onto the stone floor.

Across Shahr-dari Square, the sound of hammering on copper and revving of motorbike engines bounced off the arched walkways. The smell of frankincense lingered around carpet stalls with signs quoting the great poet Hafez, who wrote so eloquently of wine and desires of the heart: ‘This sky where we live is no place to lose your wings / So love, love, love.’

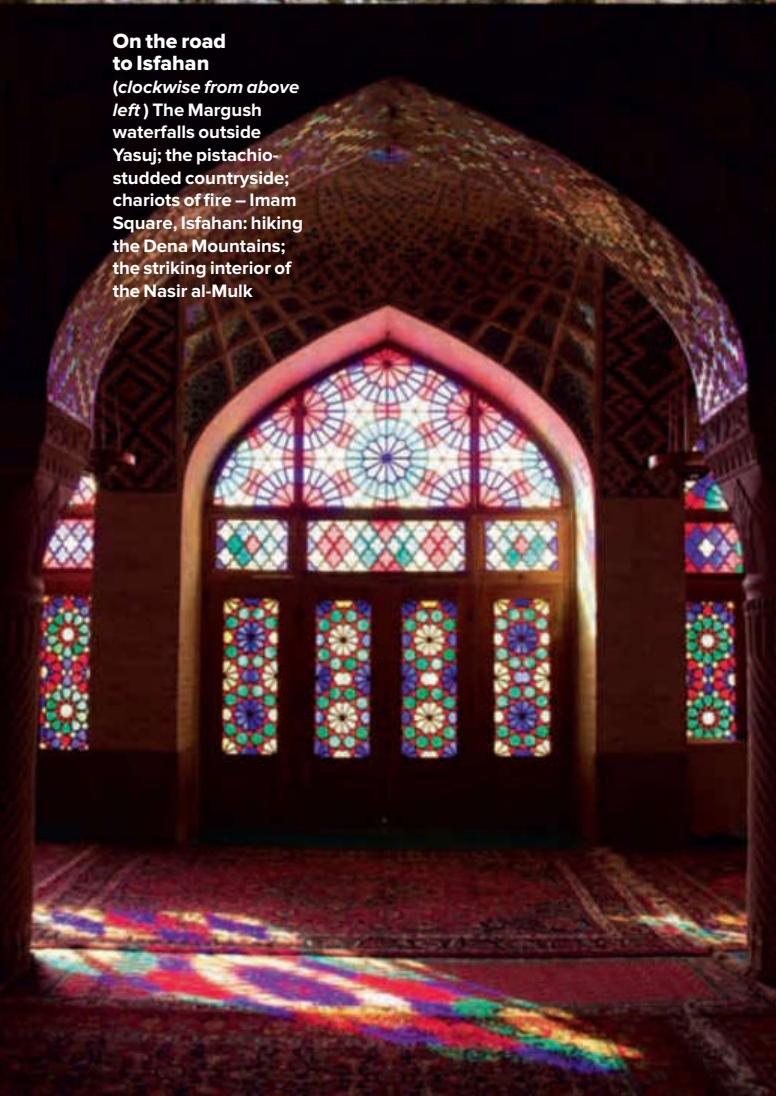
Tucked away in the depths of the bazaar was the Saray-e-Mehr Teahouse. Persian rugs hung beside tables where hungry locals were hard at work pounding piping-hot small clay pots with metal mashers. Dizi was the dish of the day. A stew-like delicacy of slow-cooked mutton, potatoes and chick peas in a tomato broth, it's eaten with strips of *sangak* ‘bubblewrap’ bread baked with a distinctive dimpled appearance. It made a welcome change from kebabs and saffron rice.

We walked off the heavy lunch through the Persian Gardens, strolling beneath shady Aleppo pines where friendly families and shy couples lounged. More picnics. More selfie-sticks. “With no bars or nightlife, there's not a lot else to do,” said Majid.

While arranged marriages are a thing of the past in Iran, the controversial practice of ‘temporary marriages’ continues to exist. “They can last anything from a couple of hours to several years,” explained Majid. These ‘marriages’ are essentially designed to allow deeply religious men to be able to indulge in certain acts without ▶



**On the road
to Isfahan**
(clockwise from above
left) The Margush
waterfalls outside
Yasuj; the pistachio-
studded countryside;
chariots of fire – Imam
Square, Isfahan; hiking
the Dena Mountains;
the striking interior of
the Nasir al-Mulk





‘Beneath the gleaming turquoise dome of the Shah Mosque, the mellifluous notes of the call to prayer echoed down walls decorated with half a million tiles’

◀ officially committing a sin. A small ‘dowry’ is exchanged. There’s a rather different name for that sort of thing in the West.

Politics and pomegranates

The long and winding road to Isfahan was a special one: high passes with large dune-like hills and jagged peaks carpeted in a moss-like fuzz of trees. In the Dena Mountains, where the peaks tickle the clouds at heights of more than 3,000m, a pair of newlyweds invited me to join their picnic. We sat cross-legged, sipping tea, smoking *shisha* (a waterpipe with fruit-flavoured tobacco) and nibbling on sticky pomegranates. We talked of life in modern Iran. “I don’t wear my headscarf when I travel to other countries,” said the wife. “We love the West but they have the wrong idea about us,” added her husband.

Politics is never far away here: ‘Down with Israel’ posters stand outside the most majestic of mosques and the odd anti-America sentiment can be seen on roadsides. The topic of diplomatic relations is often high on the agenda. “Of course we have an atomic

bomb,” said a taxi driver in Tehran. “We could destroy Israel in an hour if we wanted to but we don’t.”

I wondered whether Majid thought Iran would benefit from being a little more liberal – allowing, for example, women the option of choosing whether to cover their heads. “Iran needs that change but at a time when the majority of society will accept it. Otherwise the country will descend into chaos.”

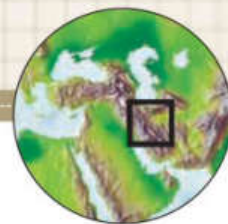
Into Isfahan

An important city of commerce since Parthian times (247 BC to AD 224) and former capital of Persia, Isfahan was likened to Florence by French traders. Its main focal point is Meidan Emam (Imam Square), allegedly only second in size to Beijing’s Tiananmen. Originally a field for polo and wrestling matches watched over by Shah Abbas the Great in the early 17th century, it’s an impressive space, with grand mosques and *medressas* (religious schools). But it doesn’t have quite the same immediate impact as the public squares in, say, Moscow or Marrakech.

Neon signs illuminated the two-storey arcades, fountains sprayed high and horse carts laden with squealing families raced each other like Roman chariots. Beneath the gleaming turquoise dome of the Shah Mosque, a man took a break from renovating the mosaics, cleared his throat and sang the call to prayer; his mellifluous notes echoed around the chamber and down walls decorated with half a million tiles.

An oversized national flag announced our arrival back in Tehran, a flash of red, white and green that fluttered against the snowy backdrop of 5,610m Mount Damavand, Iran’s tallest mountain.

A man sped past on a motorbike with a sheep on his lap. He waved and blew a kiss. The warmth of the people is indisputable but the future for Iran, and its place in the wider world, is less certain. I wondered what the fortune-telling budgerigar of Shiraz would have to say. 🦜



Iran Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Tehran
Population: 82 million
Languages: Persian (Farsi); some English is spoken
Time: GMT+3.5 (Mar-Sept GMT+4.5)
Visas: Required by UK nationals, and must be obtained in advance. It's a complicated process but most tour operators can assist.
Money: Iranian rial (IRR), currently around IRR45,000 to the UK£. US dollars accepted in some places. ATMs do not accept foreign cards – take enough cash.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ **Optimum time to visit:** pleasant conditions, temperatures around 24°C in Tehran. Peak of domestic tourism.
 ■ **Hot** and dry; temperatures up to 40°C.
 ■ **Cold**, especially the north; can drop below freezing. Crossing mountain passes often treacherous.

✚ **Health & safety**
 No vaccinations are required; being **up to date with standard vaccinations** is advised. Tap water is best avoided. Sun protection is advisable.
 Iran is a safe country though guard against pickpockets in larger cities. The biggest danger you're likely to encounter is **crossing the roads** in Tehran.

📖 **Further reading & information**
Iran (Bradt, 2014), the most in-depth look at the country
Iran (Lonely Planet, 2012)
Revolutionary Iran: A History of the Islamic Republic (Penguin, 2014) by Michael Axworthy, a fascinating look at the country's modern history
Mirrors of the Unseen: Journeys in Iran (Picador, 2007) by Jason Elliot, an evocative look at Persian culture
tourismiran.ir/en Tourism Iran

🌐 **More online**
 Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/161 for links to more content:
ARCHIVE ARTICLES
 ♦ Climbing Mount Damavand – issue 109
 ♦ A tour of Iran – issue 36
 ♦ How to cook your own Iranian feast – online
PLANNING GUIDES
 ♦ Iran travel guide

THE TRIP

i The author travelled with **Wild Frontiers** (020 7736 3968, wildfrontierstravel.com). Its guided 15-day *Iran Unveiled* trip costs from £2,895pp and visits a number of places including Tehran, Yazd, Shiraz, Isfahan, Persepolis and the Bavanat Valley. The price includes accommodation, all meals, transport and expert guiding but excludes international flights.

✈ **Getting there**
 The only direct flights to Iran are with **Iran Air** (iranair.co.uk), which flies three times a week from Heathrow to Tehran. Flight time is around six hours.
 The author travelled with **Qatar Airways** (0333 320 2454, qatarairways.com), which offers a daily service via Doha. Returns costs from around £450.

🚗 **Getting around**
Iran Air and **Caspian Airlines** (caspian.aero) offer a good air network.
 There is a decent **long-distance bus** service. A one-way ticket from Tehran to Isfahan costs around IRR300,000 (£6.50). Journey time is seven hours.
 Note, **city buses are gender separated** – men at the front, women at the back.

£ **Cost of travel**
 Iran offers **good value for money**. Expect to pay IRR60,000 (£1.30) for a glass of cinnamon tea; IRR150,000 (£3) for entry into most monuments and museums; around IRR450,000 (£10) for dinner in a decent restaurant.

🛏 **Accommodation**
 While clean and comfy, many Iranian hotels require modernisation. Some have touches of old-school opulence though, particularly Isfahan's **Abbasi Hotel** (abbasihotel.ir). In remoter corners, such as the Bavanat Valley, **homestays** offer a taste of local life.


📖 **Need to know**
 Iran is a dry country and **alcohol is strictly forbidden**. Bags are X-rayed on arrival so don't try to sneak any in.
Women must cover their heads, arms and legs at all times except in the privacy of hotel rooms. Men must ensure their legs remain unseen – no shorts.
 Official currency is the rial but prices are often quoted in **toman** (sub-divided rials, with ten toman to a rial). **Haggling isn't common** – don't expect shopkeepers to drop their prices.
Persian cuisine is rather repetitive. Most meals comprise kebabs (chicken, lamb, trout) served with saffron rice. Look for more interesting dishes such as *fesenjan*, chicken stew with toasted walnut and pomegranate.

IRAN HIGHLIGHTS



- 1 Tehran**
Explore the bazaars, mosques and palaces of the busy capital.
- 2 Yazd**
Discover fire temples and other Zoroastrian secrets in this desert city.
- 3 Bavanat Valley**
Experience Iran's most impressive landscapes and meet the nomads who call it home.
- 4 Shiraz**
Pay your respects at poet Hafez's tomb (*above*), in the heartland of Persia.
- 5 Dena Mountains**
Seek solitude in this rugged range, famed for its hiking trails.
- 6 Isfahan**
Shop until you drop in the bustling markets and seek spiritual enlightenment in Imam Square.





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Wanderlust

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Whether you took some amazing images on your latest trip, or if you think you've got some corkers from past adventures, hurry up and send them in!

The four winners of our Amateur competition will receive the prize of a lifetime: a photo commission (for two) to Western Australia, courtesy of Tourism Western Australia. The prize for the winner of our Portfolio contest – open to amateur and professional snappers – is £3,000.

So don't delay, send those shots in now!

Win a commission

AMATEUR COMPETITION

The largest state in the country, Western Australia offers adventures for everyone – whether you're a lover of landscapes, wildlife, coast or culture. And it provides endless opportunities for snappers, too.

Western Australia is brimming with exotic animals, delicious food and wine, vast empty spaces and one of the most vibrant cities in the country, Perth. This is why *Wanderlust* has teamed up with Tourism Western Australia (westernaustralia.com) to whisk four winners off to the state on an extraordinary photographic commission.

How to enter

We want you to send in your best travel images. Submissions can be of any location, and can have been taken at any time, but must fit into one of our four categories: People, Wildlife, Landscape or Travel Icons.

In the Travel Icons category, we're looking for subjects that have achieved landmark status in the travel world. For example, sights such as Iguazu Falls, Jordan's rock-hewn city of Petra or busy market traders in Marrakech – but captured in an unusual, imaginative way. Be creative – the more original the better!

Win £3,000!

PORTFOLIO COMPETITION

We also have another competition, which is open to both amateur and professional photographers. In our Portfolio category, we are looking for a striking set of images, each individually eye-catching in their own right but also work together to tell a clear and striking story.

The collection of five images should reflect one of the same four categories as the Amateur competition: People, Wildlife, Landscape or Travel Icons. After expert judging, one overall winner will walk away with £3,000.



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Exploring Western Australia's rugged landscapes, you can build up quite a thirst. Fortunately the state is streaked with vineyards and produces some of Australia's finest wines. Head to Margaret River for super cabernet sauvignon and merlot, or sample Swan Valley's chenin blanc and chardonnay.

Hungry? State capital Perth is home to more restaurants per capita than any other city in Australia. While you are there, look out for marron, a crayfish-like crustacean only available in Western Australia. Rock lobsters are also a delicacy here,

mostly found between Perth and Geraldton. If you're feeling adventurous, you can have a go at catching one yourself.

Western Australia is also the world's fourth-largest producer of black truffles. Head out into the forests of Manjimup on a guided foraging trip before sampling the delicacy in one of the town's specialist restaurants.

In short, Western Australia: big state, huge plate! Get a taste for all this fantastic food for yourself when you travel with Tourism Western Australia. www.westernaustralia.com

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Closing date for entries is 31 October 2015

Best of luck!





THE WORLD'S BEST GUIDES

The inspiring, amazing, tireless heroes of travel – that's who the **Wanderlust World Guide Awards** celebrates. **Lyn Hughes** introduces 2015's deserving winners

Every time. Every single time. I can't get through the annual *Wanderlust World Guide Awards* ceremony without crying at least twice. Listening to the stories of the nominees – the individuals that go above and beyond to make our travel experiences truly great – is always tear-inducing. They are unfailingly humbling, fascinating, modest, marvellous people.

We received a record number of nominations this year – thanks so much for those. Choosing a winner was an absolute nightmare as always. Really, they are all winners. But after some bickering among the judging panel, we finally came up with our top three.

It's another incredible trio, and one that Paul Morrison – *Wanderlust* co-founder (and my late husband) – would approve of. I set up the World Guide Awards after Paul's death in 2004; he was fanatical about the importance of good guides. Paul would've loved to spend time with this year's nominees.

This year, we are also giving out our first *Outstanding Contribution Award*. The recipient has been making so many visitors' Indian journeys unforgettable for so long, we felt it was time to acknowledge his work.

The results were announced at London's Royal Geographical Society on 13 October. Turn over to find out who took this year's prizes...

How the winners were chosen

We asked you to nominate your guides, and received thousands of nominations. We shortlisted these and invited further testimonials. The judging panel then decided who'd win Gold, a £5,000 bursary; Silver £2,500; and Bronze £1,000.

The bursaries, supported by Swarovski Optik, are spent on worthwhile projects chosen by the winners. Further prizes were very kindly provided by Swarovski Optik (swarovskioptik.com), Nomad Travel Store (nomadtravel.co.uk) and Powertraveller (powertraveller.com). ►



Mark Steadman

Where he guides:
Asia

Booked through:
Wild Frontiers
(wildfrontierstravel.com)



“A pure joy.” That’s what you called Mark. His warmth and enthusiasm leapt from the (many, *many*) pages of testimonials we received; by the end of the judging process, the whole panel were on the verge of signing up for one of his trips. “People will clearly follow him anywhere,” said Lyn Hughes, “and he also has a great rapport with the locals too.”

The judges were impressed not only by Mark’s guiding talents (his knowledge, his empathy, his sense of fun) but also his bond with the local communities he leads trips to – not least in Laos, where he has helped set up an education foundation. “He is not only a leader,” summed up one traveller, “he is a leader by example.”

WHAT YOU SAID

“He understood our needs before we knew them ourselves.”

“Mark sees the best in everyone, and treats everyone – client and local – with equal respect.”

“It’s the little touches, the unusual extras. He always comes up with something memorable.”

“He has a love for people, an eye for beauty, and a wonderful ability to take an experience and describe it with amazing grace.”

“Mark never lost his patience.”

“He changed my life. He noticed I was getting on well with a fellow single traveller and, without us knowing, ensured we sat together on flights, giving us time to talk. We’re now in a relationship!”

THE JUDGES’ VIEW

Derek Moore said that Mark “ticks all the boxes: as a guide, a leader, and someone who puts back into the communities he works with.”

BURSARY PLANS

Mark will put his bursary towards Lone Buffalo, a community project in Laos that he co-founded. It provides free, quality English tuition to young people living in the world’s most heavily bombed province.



Orlando Haraseb

Where he guides:
Namibia

Booked through:
Audley (audleytravel.com)
/ Ultimate Safaris
(ultimatesafaris.na)



Orlando is one of the most respected guides in Namibia.

This shone through in the testimonials; one simply stated: “He’s in a class of his own.”

An ex-policeman and former international footballer, now a lead guide – and a trainer of other guides – he combines that rare mix of boundless knowledge (on a wide range of subjects), professionalism, enthusiasm and an occasionally wicked sense of humour. All this makes travelling with him a joy and a revelation.

Moreover, his colleagues also highly rate him – one travel-trade colleague said, “Hands down, he is the best guide I have ever worked with.”

WHAT YOU SAID

“Orlando is far more than just a brilliant field guide; he’s proactive in all aspects of tourism and conservation.”

“Orlando makes every single traveller on his trips feel like they

are part of the conversation and part of the journey.”

“He is witty and funny and easy to trust and like. I swear that at least 75% of Namibians know and love him!”

“You can’t travel to Namibia with Orlando and not burst into tears when it’s time to say goodbye.”

THE JUDGES’ VIEW

Bill Bryson was a huge Orlando fan: “He sounds like an absolutely incredible guy. It is clear he is passionate about sharing his vast wealth of knowledge with people, and does so in an inspiring way.”

BURSARY PLANS

Orlando plans to donate some of his bursary to Ultimate Safaris’ Conservation Travel Foundation (conservationtravelfoundation.org), to be used by the youth sports academy in Erwee, his home village. He would also like to do a specialised bird-ringing course, to add to his birding repertoire.



Sue Guthrie

Where she guides:
Ethiopia
Booked through:
Explore
(explore.co.uk)



‘Mother Ethiopia’. That was the nickname given to Sue by one of her travellers (who also called her “bonkers – but in the nicest possible way”). She has a real love of – and empathy – for Ethiopia and manages to bring the country alive for the people she guides there, ensuring they are well looked after while also teaching them Amharic and filling them in on the local culture. She is also, says one client, “an absolute hoot!”

She cares passionately about the local people too. Her mantra is ‘spread peace and happiness’, and she encourages her clients to engage with communities in a helpful and sensitive way.

WHAT YOU SAID

“The most experienced and perfect tour leader I have ever met.”

“Sue was like the Duracell bunny: full of energy and enthusiasm.”

“Right from the start, her firm commitment to responsible tourism was apparent.”

“Thanks to Sue, I came home from Ethiopia thinking that every birr I’d spent had made a real difference to someone.”

“She consistently goes above and beyond the call of duty.”

THE JUDGES’ VIEW

“Sue is a very special individual,” commented Bill Bryson. Paul Goodyer added, “Not only does she have firm principles and excellent people skills, she sounds like a great laugh – just the sort of person you want to travel with.”

BURSARY PLANS

Sue wants to help the people on the streets of Ethiopia at a grass-roots level. “There are people dying every day; they beg until they raise enough for hospital fees. I would like to help financially. For instance, there is an old blind beggar I give money to every month – I would like to fund a shop for him so he can get off the streets, and have a better life.”



Dheeraj ‘Monty’ Bhatt

Where he guides:
India
Booked through:
Intrepid Travel
(intrepidtravel.com)



We just couldn’t leave Monty out. He’s been nominated and commended by so many readers, so many times, that we are giving him a special award – *The Outstanding Contribution Award*.

Monty knows India intimately, and is exactly the person you want to see when you step off the plane in this bewitching – yet sometimes baffling – country. He smooths problems, calms nerves and variously acts as translator, medic, concierge, history teacher, bodyguard, big brother and best mate as the need arises.

So many people who have travelled with him hailed Monty as “the best guide ever”. Many of them have returned to India specifically in order to travel with him again. Many of those people no longer think of him as a guide, but as a good friend.

WHAT YOU SAID

“I’ve never seen a guide as devoted as Monty.”

“He will make you feel comfortable when things aren’t so comfortable. We felt safe in Monty’s hands.”

“His knowledge made for a more personal introduction to India.”

“Nothing was ever too much trouble, no matter how demanding the traveller.”

“Monty solved every problem we encountered, and we always felt like everything was under control.”

“When the trip finished he gave us all small gifts; for me, a headband – he’d noticed I’d been wearing them on the trip, and had noted my favourite colour.”

THE JUDGES’ VIEW

Peter Antoniou commented, “You just can’t keep a good guide down – by having been nominated so many times, Monty’s proven that he is a consistently excellent guide.”

Lyn added, “Many travellers find arriving in India a culture shock – Monty clearly eases their worries, and helps them appreciate all that is wonderful about the country.”

WHAT THE WINNERS DID NEXT...

How 2014's top guides spent their bursaries



GOLD Efrain Valles

Guides for: Amazonas Explorer, Peru
(amazonas-explorer.com)

"At the Chicuchas Wasi for Girls [where Efrain is on the board], a big problem for our students is dental care. We're using the bursary to bring the dentist to the school and treat all our girls... and in November we start treating their parents too!"



SILVER Charlie Jaques

Guides for: Back-Roads Touring, France
(backroadstouring.com)

"I split my bursary between two great charities: Freedom from Torture – an organisation that helps victims of torture find a brighter future – and Circus Kathmandu, which helps find kids sold into slavery and helps them start to rebuild their lives."



BRONZE Bunyoung Roeurn

Guides for: G Adventures, Cambodia
(gadventures.co.uk)

"I registered the Learning to Share Foundation as a local charity and opened a Lts Center at my home in Siem Reap where I teach English to poor and homeless children in my spare time."



BRONZE Lewis Mangaba

Guided for: Asilia Africa, Tanzania
(asiliaafrica.com)

"Thanks to the bursary I have touched many souls to date. I've been conducting training for guides back in Zimbabwe, with about 20 guides, preparing them for their future roles in rebuilding tourism there."

THE JUDGES



Lyn Hughes
Editor-In Chief,
Wanderlust



Bill Bryson
Legendary
travel writer



Mark Carwardine
Author,
photographer
& TV wildlife
expert



Derek Moore
Travel Industry
Guru/AITO



Paul Goodyer
Co-founder,
Nomad Travel
Stores



Peter Antoniou
Swarovski Optik

COMMENDED GUIDES

Many congratulations to the following fantastic guides who also deserve a special mention:

Hamid Oumezdou
KE Adventure, Morocco
Asanga Bandara Rajapakse
Intrepid Travel, Sri Lanka
Kelsey Tonner
Worldwide, Backroads
Herson Guevara
Costa Rica, Travelsphere / Viatur Travel

KNOW A GREAT GUIDE!

Have you travelled with a great guide? An individual who has transformed your experience and really made your trip? Then tell us all about them! Nominate your top guide for next year's award now at: www.worldguideawards.co.uk

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go with the flow and you will be rewarded with an intriguing tour. Appreciate the pomp and propaganda of Pyongyang before heading out of the city and meandering through the endless corridors of the International Friendship Exhibition. Our North Korea tours include

all guiding, meals, transport, transfers and accommodation within the country. In addition, we include the North Korean visa fee and a full visa service – making the visa process as straight forward as possible. Visit www.regentholidays.co.uk/northkorea for more information.



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Join Carl on our 2016 Pioneering North Korea Group Tour for a truly unique experience. Voted one of Wanderlust's 50 Best Trips in 2014 the itinerary will take you firmly off-the-beaten-track to visit towns and regions rarely visited by other travellers. After discovering the classic sights, leave behind the giant structures and grand buildings of Pyongyang and travel by chartered aircraft to remote towns like Hoeryong and Chongjin, where a surreal drive through the industrial city reveals a different side to this hidden country.

**Pioneering North Korea
Group Tour 2016**
18 Days from £3,100pp

EXPERT CORNER

Carl Meadows

Regent's resident North Korea expert, Carl Meadows, has visited the country twenty times and was delighted to be awarded Highly Commended at the 2013 Wanderlust World Guide Awards for his exceptional guiding in this fascinating country.

Even after twenty visits, my excitement for the country has never wavered. Your compulsory North Korean guides are your window to the country – a warm and friendly approach to them will be reciprocated and likely result in their striving to add special and unexpected elements to your tour, giving you even more out of your time in the DPRK



TRAVEL WITH A GREAT GUIDE

Take a trip with the 2015 *Wanderlust* World Guide Awards winners

The quality of a guide can make or break a trip – and usually you don't know beforehand how good they'll be. But that's not the case if you travel with a *Wanderlust* World Guide Awards winner. These inspirational individuals, who lead varied adventures, are some of the best guides on the planet. Find out about this year's winners on p100, then start planning your next trip.

Laos

Lift the lid with Gold guide, Mark Steadman

Mark Steadman leads you through the country he calls home on *Wild Frontiers' Laos Unlocked* trip. Wander UNESCO-listed Luang Prabang, ponder the mysteries of the Plain of Jars, explore the 4,000 Islands region, wind down at the town of Champasak, delve into caves and waterfalls, and meet locals at remote villages along the way.

Who: Wild Frontiers (020 7736 3968, wildfrontierstravel.com)

When: 14 Feb & 9 Oct 2016

How long: 14 days

How much: From £2,175 (excl flights)

Namibia

Spot game with Silver winner, Orlando Haraseb

Guide Orlando Haraseb reveals the wonders of northern Namibia on *Audley's Kaokoland Discoverer* trip. Spot lions, rhinos and elephants on safari in Etosha NP, visit the semi-nomadic people of Kaokoland and Opuwo, admire Epupa Falls, discover rock art in Damaraland and finish on the Skeleton Coast, searching for seals.

Who: Audley (01993 838450, audleytravel.com)

When: TBC

How long: 15 days

How much: TBC

Ethiopia

Mix mountains, castles and more with Bronze winner, Sue Guthrie

Pack in the best of Ethiopia on *Explore's Blue Nile & Lalibela* trip. Join passionate guide Sue Guthrie (pictured) for a historic journey, visiting the walled city of Harar, the rock-carved churches of Lalibela and the castle of Gondar. There are impressive natural sights too: thundering Tississat Falls, the rugged Simien Mountains and wild Awash NP.



Ethiopian etiquette
Having an expert guide, like Sue Guthrie, makes a guided trip more special

Who: Explore (01252 884287, explore.co.uk)

When: Selected dates, Nov 2015-Dec 2016

How long: 14 days

How much: From £2,099 (incl flights)

India & Nepal

Find the best of both countries with Monty Bhatt, winner of the Outstanding Contribution Award

Join Dheeraj 'Monty' Bhatt on *Intrepid's Delhi to Kathmandu* trip to see north India and Nepal at their best. Fall for New Delhi, the Taj Mahal and the temples of Madhya Pradesh, then sail down the Ganges and cross into Nepal. Hop on a rickshaw and explore the Maya Devi Temple, spot rhinos and monkeys in Chitwan NP, canoe down the Rapti River and finish in Kathmandu.

Who: Intrepid (0808 274 5111, intrepidtravel.com)

When: Selected dates, Nov 2015-Feb 2016

How long: 15 days

How much: From £955 (excl flights)

Morocco

Camp out in the Sahara with Highly Commended guide, Hamid Oumezdou

Live and breathe the mighty desert on *KE Adventure's Edge of the Sahara Trek*. Drive from Marrakech through the Atlas Mountains

and the Draa Valley with Morocco expert Hamid Oumezdou. From the palm groves of Ouled Driss, hike through rippling sand and sleep under star-filled skies, including a climb up the high dunes of Zahar for most the unforgettable sunset.

Who: KE Adventure (01768 773966, keadventure.com)

When: Selected dates, Nov 2015-May 2016 & Oct 2016-May 2017

How long: 8 days

How much: From £495 (excl flights)

Sri Lanka

Explore the teardrop isle with Highly Commended guide, Asanga Rajapakse

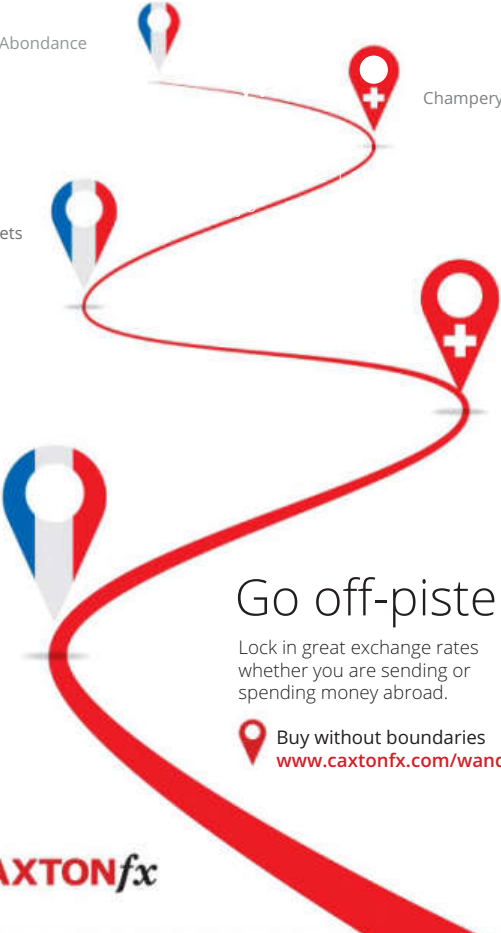
Discover the secrets behind the island's temples and cuisine with *Intrepid's Circle Sri Lanka* tour. Highly commended guide Asanga Rajapakse will reveal the mysteries behind the ruins of Anuradhapura and 1,000-year-old Polonnaruwa and lead you into Dambulla's cave temples. You'll then clamber up rock-top Sigiriya, get creative at a cooking class in Haputale and round off your trip in cosmopolitan Colombo.

Who: Intrepid (0808 274 5111, intrepidtravel.com)

When: 16 Jan

How long: 15 days

How much: From £1,220 (excl flights)



Abondance

Champéry

Les Gets

Morgins

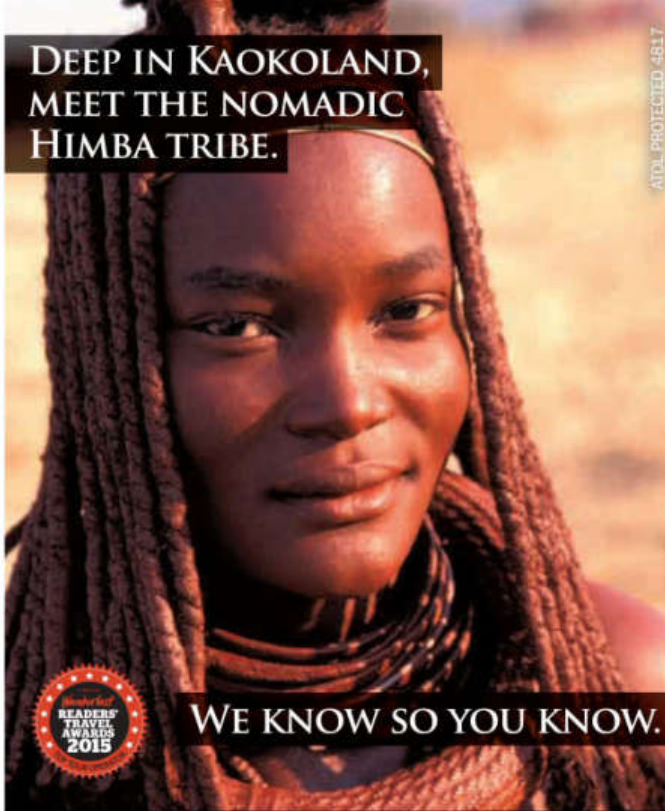
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FROM THE ROAD

Letters, tips, photos & exploits from you, our endlessly adventurous readers

The 12m-long whale shark is an ecosystem in itself, I realised as I snorkelled side-on to get a better view. Large remora suckerfish flank her, sliding up and down her skin, while pilot fish appear to lead her through the ocean. Then something grabs my fin. I kick back to shake it off but it grabs me again. I look around. August is trying to tell me that another whale shark is moving in to my right. It comes out of the planktonic gloom, alarmingly large and wide-mouthed. At least 12m long and, on profile, not that much different from a great white.

It swims towards me, near trapping me between the two of them. I wonder if this is the moment I become the filling in a whale shark sandwich. I stop and turn quickly, swim along their vast bodies till I'm behind them and in open sea again.

I watch as they carry on with their lives, oblivious, knowing full well that I was safe all along, despite the size of them. The vestigial teeth of whale sharks are so small you can only see their gums, and their gullet is only about the size of a fist. They couldn't swallow me even if they tried. Not that they would: whale sharks are placid filter feeders, their diet composed only of the ocean's smaller creatures.

Water birth

This is St Helena, and we're 5km offshore from Bank's Battery in 100m deep water. The sea is warm with a moderate but growing swell. Pregnant whale sharks turn up here every summer, large

■ Your Story

Swimming with St Helena's whale sharks

Reader **David Higgins**

jumps in with the huge

fish that mysteriously

flock to the Atlantic isle



females with the tell-tale bulge along their abdomens. These large, pregnant females are a rarity in the world of whale shark research and no one seems to know why. There are 14 of them in the sea with us right now, turning arcs across the surface as they feed.

Keith Yon, our skipper, finds them every summer off Bank's Battery, Egg Island and in smaller numbers everywhere along the coast of St Helena. He takes regular tour groups out to swim with them, always following the code of conduct that requires snorkellers to remain 3m from the animal and 4m from the tail – to protect both the sharks and the snorkellers.

The world's largest living fish, whale sharks feed on some of the smallest zooplankton including fish eggs, micro-algae and plankton sifted out from gallons of water with every gaping mouthful. The food is caught on filter pads, thought to be modified gill-rakers, but looking more like giant coffee filters.

I swim with them till they leave me tired in the deep sea. The swell hides the boat, and when I rise on a wave and spot it, I'm a good 300m away. I know there are other sharks in these waters – hammerhead, thresher and mako – but I try not to think of them as I snorkel slowly back, all alone, 5km out to sea. When I reach the boat we move on to find more of the world's largest fish.

Over the summer I swim with them time and time again. Sometimes it's with only a single shark; at other times I swim with large aggregations. I help



Morgan and Mike as they measure the fish with a piece of knotted string that's 12m long. Morgan and Mike stretch the string between the whale sharks' gaping mouths and their giant tail fins while I photograph the sides of the fish for identification purposes. We find whale sharks that can't be measured accurately as they stretch beyond the length of string that Morgan has prepared. Whale sharks are known to grow to 18m in length, but it's unlikely that we've measured the largest – they could grow to over 20m.

The Atlantic Galápagos

No one knows why they come to the summer seas of St Helena. We don't know what route they take or the numbers that arrive, but last year an aggregation of 35 whale sharks was recorded. Importantly, the sex ratios are close to 1:1, which is unheard of elsewhere, with the exception of the Galápagos Islands. St Helena has already been labelled 'the Galápagos of the Atlantic' for the number of endemic species found on land. In fact, if taken by area, St Helena outstrips the Galápagos Islands for the number of terrestrial endemic

species; now we're discovering other reasons to liken this small outpost to those wondrous Pacific islands.

I swam with whale sharks many times over my last summer on St Helena. At such times it's easy to forget the scientific mystery and become lost in their majesty. Sadly, my time to leave arrives and in late February 2015 I board the *RMS St Helena* for the last time to take the six-day crossing to Cape Town.

Have you got a travel tale to tell? Post it at wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust ►

■ Readers' Pictures

YOUR PHOTOS

Been somewhere beautiful? Done something amazing?

Email fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk – make us jealous!



"Summitting 4,985m Mount Kenya: blue skies and sunshine – perfect weather!"
Julia Doran



"Heading up, up and away! Our balloon took off in the dark, but the sun soon illuminated the landscape of Cappadocia, Turkey, below. There were over 100 balloons in the air when I took this." Trevor Earthy



"With my mum, Janet, chatting to the local false-tooth seller at the Djemaa el-Fna, Marrakech, Morocco." Emma Jane Clark



"Sitting in Devil's Pool, on the edge of Victoria Falls, Zambia, with a brave group of friends." Paul Thompson



"I love *Wanderlust* – it's inspired a lot of awesome travel. I'm currently working in Antarctica and have brought a year's worth of magazines with me. I'm reading this one outside on a lovely sunshine day at -20°C!" Terri Souster, Antarctica

Where does your *Wanderlust* take you?

Every month we ask 'Where does your *Wanderlust* take you?', giving you a chance to win a goody bag including a versatile **High UV with Insect Shield Buff®** – the ultimate travel accessory (RRP £21). But can you top Terri (above)? Show us where your *Wanderlust* takes you and where you take your *Wanderlust*!

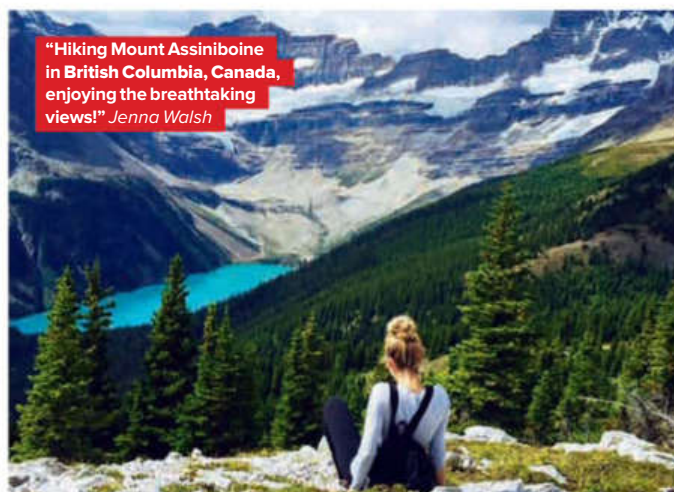
Take your magazine with you on your next trip and share a pic with us. Post it on our Facebook wall, tweet it to us at @wanderlustmag, email it to fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk or hashtag it #wanderlustmag on Instagram.



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"Entering the northern Pantanal, Brazil, with Louise, Rosie and Anna." Charles Markus



"Hiking Mount Assiniboine in British Columbia, Canada, enjoying the breathtaking views!" Jenna Walsh



LETTERS

Your mail and missives: this issue, walking Andorra, a tribute to a great guide, snapping camouflaged cats and unexpected Greek wildlife

◀ Cat camouflage

After reading about Botswana [*February 2015, issue 153*] I thought I'd share a story from a recent safari.

The country's national parks are mostly unfenced, and game-viewing may be more rewarding in the immediate surroundings. Our final destination on safaris to Botswana is invariably Mabuasehube NP, since it has always rewarded us with lion sightings. As you approach this park from the north, the track deteriorates, the sand thickens, the ruts deepen, the cattle become more scarce – and we sharpen our eyes for possible game sightings. When a male lion crossed in front of us, we slithered to a halt and grabbed the binoculars to follow his path into the bush. No luck. A large Kalahari male lion had simply vanished! Not yet in the park, we could exit the vehicle and climb onto the roof rack for a better view. Still no lion but, just in case, I took a photograph in the direction he had vanished.

That evening I zoomed in on the images on my camera. There, in the shadow of a thorn tree, we could make out the nostrils of the lion, which had us completely fooled! I will treasure this image as an example of nature's ability to surprise. Perfect camouflage.

Dr Martin Briggs, South Africa

Guide tribute

I wanted to write to say how sad I am to hear of the death of Robbi Sapington in June 2015 [in

★ STAR LETTER ★



Trailblazing in Andorra

I was the lucky winner of your Andorra competition [*May 2015, issue 156*], and my wife and I had a great week's walking there. The

Berghaus voucher was great, too. Andorra is a super country for walking, and the wildflowers and butterflies were wonderful. It really is small – one tenth the size of Cairngorms NP. The photo (*above*) was taken at one of our high points, above Soldeu. We had vultures above us!

As we were flying into Barcelona, we added three days there and loved this beautiful, arty, clean city. TIP: You really need to book tickets in advance for visiting the Sagrada Família and Park Güell; we heartily recommend the open-topped city buses, too.

Bryce Reynard, Inverness



the Sabah earthquake]. He and his father were my guides when I climbed Mount Kinabalu with a small group in January 2013. He was selfless and dedicated to whatever group he was escorting on the mountain. He also had a fantastic sense of humour, which made him great company. His love of the mountain and his home village nearby was infectious so, together with the effort of the climb (and the descent!), I was left with very special memories of two days spent in his company. There are now tributes to him on YouTube, which I have just watched. He continues to live on in people's memories and will do in mine too. Thank you Robbi.

Christina Forey, via email

Meteora meetings

Reading the article on eight wildlife encounters in Greece [*August 2015, issue 158*] brought back memories of my recent trip to the country in May 2015 with friends Debashis and Debadrita Dass. It was all the more special because we saw things that we were not expecting while hiking the trails in Meteora.

There was the brave little tortoise, who looked like he was questioning our intrusion on his afternoon siesta, and then there were the beautiful butterflies on spring flowers, which were difficult to photograph as they kept flying away the moment we managed to get them in focus!

Nandini Chakraborty, Leicester

WIN WANDERLUST GOODIES

Each issue, our winning contribution wins a haul of *Wanderlust* gear. This time, congratulations to Bryce!



Experiences JUST BACK FROM...



Belarus
Wanderlust.co.uk
forum user Nick
Langridge took
a ten-day trip to
eastern Europe

The highlight: Berezinsky National Park – walking trails through red pine, silver birch, spruce and alder to a raised bog with expansive views, coupled with a guide who knew it all.
Must see: Khatin – a village in a forest clearing, exterminated by Nazis during WW2 and now a memorial to represent all such 186 villages across Belarus.
Top tip: Know your zeros. There are 24,000 roubles to the pound and strings of zeros on the notes.



It can be confusing but shop staff are helpful and honest.
Cautionary tale: Be wary of border entry from Poland. One of the group was refused entry as the embassy hadn't stamped the visa properly.
I wish I'd known... A few more Russian words. English is spoken in places but not widely.
Anything else? Flower displays in towns and the painted wooden houses in villages were very colourful.

This month you have been mostly...

W Searching for rare wildlife: an intrepid haul from Laos down the Mekong River, hunting for the elusive Irrawaddy dolphin.
shalugids

T Snapping Asia's best bits. I loved photographing Singapore at night. Awash with colour! *greatwhitesean*

W Getting more than I bargained for. I was hoping to be lucky and see one bear in the taiga but I wasn't prepared for a whole slew!
Sharon Jenkins Carter

f Road trip planning in the US. I'm driving through Atlanta, Nashville and Memphis, down the Mississippi River to New Orleans and back to Atlanta. I cannot wait!
Herb Nanas

T Marvelling at the splendour of England's Jurassic Coast.

Went there and loved it: best coastline ever! *AkankshaDureja*

f Reflecting on the epicness of the USA's greatest trek.

The Appalachian Trail – such an amazing journey!

Christine Suantika

T Basking in our Three Peaks Challenge. Three of us managed to complete it in 23.5 hours in a Fiat Punto.

Toughest thing I've ever done!

biggsy321

W Being welcomed into the semi-nomadic world of the Himalayan yak herders. Tasting yak curd was truly an experience!
AnoushkaZoob

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

**Trampled treasure,
Palmyra, Syria**

Helen Brierley

Palmyra in September 2009 seemed like the most peaceful place in the world.

We stayed two nights in an empty hotel overlooking the ruins, and were able to come and go as we pleased, escaping the scorching midday sun in the shade of the hotel gardens. We headed out at sunrise and again in the late afternoon, the perfect time for photographs, with the whole site to ourselves, apart from a few camels waiting to give rides to nonexistent tourists.

It is painful to think of the changes that have taken place in just a few short years since.



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Brazil




SWALLOWING THE AMAZON

Brazil's biodiversity isn't only a boon for wildlife fans — it's fantastic for foodies too. And eating your way around the Amazon proves the best way to connect with its people

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS ALEX ROBINSON



River forage
The banks of the
Amazon are
a veritable larder

A man is seated, wearing a wide-brimmed hat with a white mesh top and a tan chin strap. He is dressed in a vibrant magenta robe with intricate gold and multi-colored beadwork. He holds a string of dark beads in his right hand, which also features a large blue ring. The background is a green wall with a decorative arrangement of flowers and a lit candle in a silver holder.

In the pink
A traditional Umbanda ceremony – led by a giant in magenta – offers a warm welcome to the island of Marajó

W

e arrived at the hut as fruit bats were leaving the trees and flocks of parakeets returned to roost. The Amazon night was thick and moist, aromatic with tropical flowers and the scent of brazilwood burning on a stone stove somewhere

along the dirt street. The cicadas and tree frogs were in full chorus. Moths fluttered around the street lights.

A man was waiting at the gate of the hut. He said nothing as we arrived, just beckoned us on through a little lawned garden, down a path round the back of the shack, past a brilliant-pink jambo tree

‘The giant in the pink dress just stared, sipping beer from a sherry glass that looked like a thimble in his huge hand’

and into a room. It was lit with low, incandescent light and was bare but for a few benches and an altar in the corner covered in the effigies of Catholic saints and bottles of potion. Drummers and congregants were gathered around the walls and a huge man sat on a chair in the room’s centre. He was wearing a shocking-pink, faux-silk dress and a gaily tilted satin Gainsborough hat.

All heads turned to see us as we shambled in awkwardly. The giant in the pink dress just stared, sipped beer from a sherry glass that looked like a thimble in his huge hand, stared again. Then, as the silence became almost tangible, he roared into song: “*Refletiu a luz divina* [The divine light reflected] / *Com todo seu esplendor* [with all its splendour] / *vem do reino de Oxalá* [from the kingdom of Oxalá] / *Onde há paz e amor* [where there is peace and love]”.

Drummers lost in the shadows in the room’s far corner suddenly pounded into action and the giant rose from his chair and began to

rock and sway rhythmically while roaring out more verses from his song. Others joined him and the dancing became frenzied. I felt myself swaying, slipping into trance. My friends looked on with jaws dropped. Incense rose in thick swirls from a burner waved from side to side by a devotee. The giant roared louder and louder. And then... halted. As immediately as he had begun.

The room lapsed once more into silence. The giant’s eyes were fixed on us. Then he broke into an enormous grin, gesticulated warmly and spoke, in Portuguese. “Welcome to our community! May you, our white-skinned friends receive many blessings.”

Little is more Brazilian than the old religion of Umbanda – a heady mix of West Africa, indigenous America and Catholic Europe. The three continents mix in Umbanda’s spirit-saints, its rituals, rhythms, symbols. From Umbanda and its relatives came samba and capoeira. And many of Brazil’s home-grown dishes. Ogum (or St George), the

power of thunder, is sustained by offerings of the country’s national dish *feijoada* – a rich meat stew. Oxum (Our Lady of Assumption), the spirit-power of fresh water, prefers prawns and beans.

After the ceremony the giant brought us together to eat *acaraje* – an African-Brazilian falafel, spiced with chilli and flavoured with

rich prawn paste, which is sacred to Iansa (Saint Barbara). We drunk it down with fresh cashew fruit juice – silky soft and fragranced, sour yet sweet. In the communion of food we ceased to be spectators on the edge of a strange ceremony. We had been welcomed in.

Food of the forest

The trip I’d signed up for had promised as much. The journey would, they said, make connections. We would get to know Brazil from rural and urban roots to high tables. We’d visit some of the poorest communities and see what connected them to the finest restaurants. It would, they said, be spectacular. I’d no idea what to expect.

But I knew it would be something different even at the airline luggage desk in Heathrow.

“You’re going to Rio, yes?” said the check-in clerk.

“No. Belém.” ►





Cocoa heaven
(clockwise from this)
 The cocoa fruit and
 Dona Nina in her
 kitchen with its produce
 – a packet of freshly
 made Amazon
 chocolate; shopping,
 Amazon-style; the
 superfruit açai grows
 around Belém





Cowboy cuisine
Buffalo milk is used to make high-quality mozzarella – the kind of produce Belém chef Thiago Castanho (below) tries to source

‘At the huge ranches on the island we rode with water buffalo – whose milk is key to South America’s finest mozzarella – herding them with Amazon cowboys’

◀ “I’m sorry, where?”
“Belém. Bell. Aing.”

I hadn’t heard of it either. But it was easy to reach. Six hours after a brief change of plane in Lisbon, the city was below us – a tumble of 18th century terracotta roofs backed by a jagged line of concrete spires and set amid an Amazonian wilderness. There were no roads, just city streets, and boats everywhere – fishing barques, longtails and huge cargo tankers dwarfed by the chocolate-brown River Guamá, a southern branch of the Amazon. The Amazon proper stretched on the other side of the plane, its mouth choked by a huge swampy archipelago of forest-covered islands stretching as far as the distance between London and Newcastle.

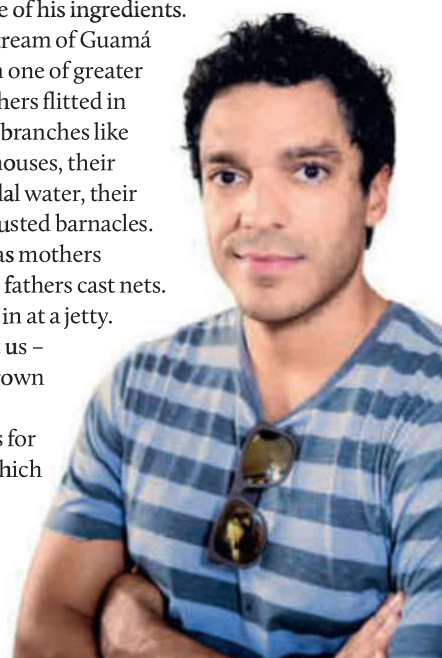
After landing we wandered the colonial streets and grand avenues of Belém, which grew rich on the brief 19th-century Amazon rubber boom. We explored Ver-o-Peso market in search of the açaí berry, the in-favour superfruit that grows in the nearby forests. In the evening we sampled *takaka*, an energising prawn soup cooked in sour manioc juice and spiced with jambu leaves (known as ‘electric daisies’); it set the mouth tingling and filled the veins like a shot of Red Bull.


The journey was all about food, and on our second night we fine-dined in the Remanso do Bosque, number 38 on the San Pellegrino list of the best restaurants in Latin America. We enjoyed a degustation menu of Amazonian flavours, from fragrant pacu fish to tart pupunha berry and energising açaí to Amazonian chocolate.

The following morning we chugged out of Belém in an old Amazon riverboat with the restaurant’s star chef Thiago Castanho. He would show us where he sourced some of his ingredients.

The boat crossed the broad stream of Guamá and plunged into a tiny creek in one of greater Belém’s myriad islands. Kingfishers flitted in front of us. Egrets floated from branches like falling flowers. We passed stilthouses, their legs long and bare in the low tidal water, their lower reaches ringed with encrusted barnacles. Children waved from dugouts as mothers paddled with whittled oars and fathers cast nets. After almost an hour we pulled in at a jetty.

Dona Nina was there to greet us – a little round woman, face as brown as the river, smile as white as a frangipani flower. She took us for a walk in her kitchen garden, which merged with the forest itself. There were spindly açaí palms and bacuri trees topped by big pink flowers. And there were camu camu bushes, heavy with ripe red berries that ▶





Beach break
Just outside São Paulo's sprawl, beaches such as Ubatuba offer respite

◀ looked like round red grapes – their flesh holds more Vitamin C than any other fruit.

We reached Dona Nina's chocolate orchard, sited next to an enormous kapok tree. Thiago split a yellow pod-like cacao fruit to reveal custardy white pulp and dozens of creamy bean-like seeds. Dona Nina took us to her kitchen to show us how she roasted these white seeds into brown cocoa beans. We ground them into pure bars, sweetening them with raw cane sugar, working amid the thick, intoxicating smell. Our mouths watered. Afterwards, we eagerly accepted samples. The chocolate melted on our tongues, as rich as the Amazon rainforest itself.

The next day we flew to Marajó, a beach-fringed island as big as Switzerland that sits in the Amazon's mouth. We had our Umbanda ceremony here. We also visited huge island ranches to ride with water buffalo, herding them with Amazon cowboys. The cowboys milked the beasts in order to make South America's finest mozzarella; we ate the cheese, and the buffalo too, in a supper of steaks as tender as sashimi with mozzarella and tomato salad. We ate the meal on a wooden deck over an Amazon tributary to the music of the forest and under the light of the full moon and stars. Then, after five days, we left the rainforest and took a plane south to São Paulo – the biggest, brashest city in South America.

From ex-felons to fine dining

São Paulo crowds together. High-rise concrete clustered in streets that stretched to every horizon. Multi-lane highways rushed between, clogged with traffic. Helicopters whirled overhead. At night the city flashed and blinked with neon and argon and the arrival of hundreds of planes. This is South America's hub, where the continent meets for business and where the myriad peoples of Brazil swarm together in search of a better life, filling hive-like breeze-bloc *favelas* (slums) that crowd around the city's sprawling outskirts.

We headed to the outskirts on our first two days in the city to visit two remarkable social projects, both of which work with food. *Cidades sem Fome* (Cities Without Hunger) has recuperated hectares of inner city waste land, much of it under electricity pylons, and turned it into urban orchards and vegetable patches providing everything from mangoes and bananas to cabbage and kale.

I met Genivaldo, a favela factory worker who migrated from the north-eastern state of Pernambuco decades previously, and who now lives as a gardener. "This place has totally changed my life," he told me. "I work with Mother Earth again, like I did when I was a boy. My health has improved. So has the community. I've seen this area turn from a rocky waste to a fertile orchard. We now have organic food for a cheaper price than you can buy regular food in the supermarket." ►



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‘By sharing food and sharing lives, we felt like we had ceased to be visitors – we had made connections’

◀ We cooked *moqueca*, a spicy coconut and seafood stew, in a home nearby and ate it in a leafy garden built under pylons – a green swathe cutting through the city’s interminable concrete.

The next day at Gastromotiva we met ex-prisoners from São Paulo’s crowded gaols, whose lives had been turned around by cooking. A scheme funded in part by our tour operator and supported by some of the city’s most distinguished restaurants trains them as chefs, giving them jobs in the city’s ever-growing gastronomic sector.

Maria told us how the project had turned her fortunes around. “Thanks to Gastromotiva I now have a real future,” she said, tears in her eyes.

“I send money back home to my kids every month. And now I have a real chance of getting a job at the D.O.M.”

At number nine on the San Pellegrino list, and with two Michelin stars, D.O.M is the


finest restaurant in Brazil, if not Latin America. Its owner – DJ-turned-chef Alex Attala – has spent decades travelling the Amazon in search of new ingredients. He’s a vigorous supporter of Gastromotiva.

Master chef
Alex Attala cooks
a mean Amazon ant

Alex greeted us personally at D.O.M when we met for our last fine-dining meal. “*Bem Vindo!* Welcome!” he said enthusiastically.

Alex sat down to eat with us, gathered over a round table. We had *pirarucu*, a giant Amazon lungfish, served in a *tucupi* and tapioca sauce; the fish’s cod-like white flesh was perfectly offset by the rich tang of the *tucupi* and the electric buzz of the jambu leaf. We sampled squid with cashew fruit and ate Amazon ant, as zesty as lemongrass. We had fettuccine made from hearts of palm – all the flavour of pasta but without the high-carb stodginess.

As we ate and chatted it seemed that all the threads of the trip had come together – from the community connection with Gastromotiva to the celebration of those fabulous ingredients from the Belém Amazon to the convivial, personable warmth of Alex Attala himself.

By sharing food and sharing lives, we felt like we had ceased to be visitors. We had made connections – with each other, with Brazil. Our journey had taken us into the heart of the country’s forests and cities; we had foraged for its food, encountered its cultures and communed with its people everywhere from village shacks to gourmet restaurants. The trip had broadened our understanding, broadened us as people. And in our final toast we brought our glasses together in homage to the journey, to new connections and the hope of exploring more cultures together. 

WHAT ABOUT THE WILDLIFE?

The food is fabulous, but there's wildlife too! Here's eight animals to keep an eye out for in the **BRAZILIAN AMAZON**



1 PINK RIVER DOLPHIN
Inia geoffrensis

WHAT? Rosy-hued freshwater mammal, otherwise known as the *boto*. Grows two to three metres in length, with a long snout and small dorsal fin.

Friendly, sociable creatures, they might be seen alone or in small groups. According to legend, they are able to emerge from the water, turn into men, seduce young ladies and then return to the river; they are often blamed for unwanted pregnancies.

HOW TO SPOT IT: It's pink!

WHERE? Widespread across the Amazon and tributaries; prefer river mouth areas, where fish are plentiful.

LIKELIHOOD OF SEEING: High – frequently seen.



2 JAGUAR
Panthera onca

WHAT? Resplendent rosette-spotted cat, the largest member of the panthera family on the continent – males weigh up to around 110kg.

The name comes from the indigenous Guaraní word *yaguar* – 'he who kills with one leap'.

HOW TO SPOT IT: Be very, very lucky.

WHERE? A limited number of travellers per year are permitted to spend time with jaguar researchers at the remote Mamirauá Reserve, which has one of the world's densest concentrations of the cats.

LIKELIHOOD OF SEEING: Very low – jaguar are secretive beasts, and hide easily in the dense rainforest. Head to the Brazilian Pantanal for a much better chance.



3 PIRANHA
Serrasalmus species

WHAT? Toothy, schooling fish with a fearsome reputation – though some of the 20-odd piranha species are actually vegetarian. Can grow up around 35-40cm long. Those teeth are sharp and tightly packed, designed for efficient piercing and shearing.

HOW TO SPOT IT: Boat trips often offer the chance for visitors to try piranha fishing; bait may be submerged to attract a feeding frenzy. Piranha are more aggressive during the dry season.

WHERE? Widespread across the Amazon Basin, typically in white-water rivers and streams.

LIKELIHOOD OF SEEING: High – guides will seek them out.



4 TOUCAN
Ramphastos species

WHAT? Beautifully big-beaked birds – indeed, their large bills are almost as big as their bodies. Body plumage is black with bright patches of yellow, white, green and red; the bills are also very colourful. They largely eat fruit and have a very long, skinny, frayed tongue.

HOW TO SPOT IT: Tough – toucans nest and roost in tree cavities, so stay up in the canopy; you'll need a good guide. However, they are frequently heard, making a barking/croaking sound as well as clacking their beaks.

WHERE? Early mornings, around the Anavilhanas Archipelago, are likely to yield success.

LIKELIHOOD OF SEEING: Low to moderate – again, the Pantanal offers better viewing opportunities.



5 HOATZIN

Opisthocomus hoazin

WHAT? It's possible that you'll smell the 'stinkbird' before you see it, as the hoatzin's unfortunate nickname deriving from the fact that it smells like dung (thanks to the bacteria in its gut). Also, it looks just as distinctive too: pheasant-sized, slightly prehistoric, blue-set starey eyes and a messy mohican. The young have claws on their wings.

HOW TO SPOT IT: Follow your nose. Look by oxbow lakes and swamps. They live in groups: a breeding pair will be accompanied by several 'helpers'.

WHERE? A riverboat trip to the Anavilhanas Archipelago.

LIKELIHOOD OF SEEING: High – often seen near water.



6 HOWLER MONKEY

Alouatta species

WHAT? Very noisy primate. Amazonia is home to three species (black, red, red-handed), all known for their raucous calls, which can cross the canopy for, it's said, 16km. They range in size from 50-90cm long, plus prehensile tail, which can be more than twice as long again. They build nests up in the trees and live in groups of up to 15-20.

HOW TO SPOT IT: Listen. Howlers have long been hunted so they stay away from humans, but their shrieking yells often resound around the jungle (particularly chilling during a thunderstorm).

WHERE? Jungle lodges around Manaus, the remoter the better.

LIKELIHOOD OF SEEING: Low – but more often heard.



7 GIANT OTTER

Pteronura brasiliensis

WHAT? Big, strong and fast, this largest of the mustelid family can compete with jaguar and caiman for the Amazon's spoils. Males grow up to 1.8m long, and can weigh over 30kg. It's diet includes fish, crabs and smaller anacondas – sensitive whiskers help them detect the vibrations of their prey.

HOW TO SPOT IT: They're day active and noisy when playing (which they do a lot) so listen out. Also look out for their cleared burrow areas on the riverbanks. They prefer slow-moving rivers.

WHERE? Better to nip over the border, into Peru's Manu Biosphere Reserve.

LIKELIHOOD OF SEEING: Moderate – guides will specifically seek them out.



8 THREE-TOED SLOTH

Bradypus pygmaeus & tridactylus

WHAT? These slooow, furry, long-limbed mammals spend 80% of their time snoozing; when they do move it's at a heady two metres a minute. They sleep curled up in trees or hanging from branches.

HOW TO SPOT IT: The two three-toed species are the types most frequently seen; they are well camouflaged (algae grows in their fur) and largely stationary; they favour trees of the Cecropia genus. Sometimes they're seen crossing rivers (they're good swimmers).

WHERE? Quieter tributaries of the Negro and Amazon rivers.

LIKELIHOOD OF SEEING: Moderate to high – the most numerous large canopy mammal. 🦋

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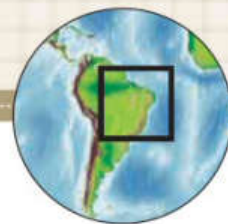
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Brazil Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Brasília

Population: 205 million

Languages: Portuguese; tribal languages

Time: GMT-3 (Coast & Brasília); GMT-4 (Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, western Pará, Rondonia, Roraima); GMT-5 (Acre, West Amazonas). Some areas observe daylight saving.

International dialling code: +55

Visas: Not required by UK nationals

Money: Real (R\$), currently around R\$5.8 to the UK£. ATMs are widespread and credit cards widely accepted.

When to go BELÉM

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ Belém is equatorial – temperatures range between the mid-30°C and low 20°C year round. January-April is height of the east Amazon **rainy season**: up to 400mm of rain daily. Few visitors.

■ Rain diminishes. **June-December** is **driest**, with occasional heavy rain showers and sunny afternoons with blue skies. River levels highest May-July and lowest August-December, making these latter months the best for seeing wildlife.

■ **Cirio de Nazare festival** (usually second weekend of October) – the biggest festival in northern Brazil, with street parties and religious parades.

SÃO PAULO

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ **Wettest months**; up to 240mm of rain in January.

■ Dry and cool; night time temperatures dropping below 15°C, days in the low 20°C. July and August are **driest months**, best for coastal beaches.

■ **Carnival**. São Paulo's is one of the biggest and most spectacular in Brazil.



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Health & safety

Yellow fever, hepatitis A and B and typhoid **vaccinations** are recommended for Belém, as well as malaria prophylaxis for the Ilha do Marajó (although there is currently no malaria around Soure town). Hepatitis A and B jabs are recommended for São Paulo too, where there is also a small risk of catching dengue fever.

Take cabs at night in Belém and São Paulo. Keep cameras in bags and do not wear expensive jewellery while out walking the streets.



Further reading & information

Brazil (Footprint, 2014), by the author of this article, is the most up to date guidebook and is particularly strong on Belém and São Paulo. New edition due January 2016. Footprint is the only publisher to have separate pocket **Focus Guides** to São Paulo and the Amazon region (including Belém and Marajó island), which are downloadable from footprinttravelguides.com.

www.lata.org Latin American Travel Association

THE TRIP

The author travelled with **Culture Xplorers** (+1 215 870 3585, culturexplorers.com). A similar nine-day tailor-made itinerary including domestic flights, all trips, guides, lodging and most meals costs from £2,980pp, based on two sharing. There are two set small-group departures scheduled for 2016: 26 June and 4 September.



Getting there

TAP (flytap.com) flies from London Heathrow to Belém via Lisbon, returning from São Paulo; fares from £720. Journey time is 8-10hrs to Belém, 12-14hrs from São Paulo, including plane changes.



Getting around

TAM (tam.com.br) runs internal flights. Flight time from Belém to São Paulo is 3.5hrs.



Cost of travel

The plummeting Brazilian real has seen the country **turn from one of South America's most expensive destinations to one of its cheapest** in the space of just 18 months. Expect to spend around £20 a day staying in hostels and eating cheap. Staying in air-conditioned hotels and dining at better restaurants will cost you between £45 and £60 a day. Luxury is available from around £120 a day.

As a guide, a can of beer costs R\$2 (35p), a cup of coffee R\$1 (16p), a bottle of water R\$3 (50p).



Accommodation

Hostels are the cheapest option in Brazil. Expect to pay around £7 for a bed in a dormitory. **Pousadas** (inns) range from simple guesthouses to plush establishments verging on boutique hotels; these generally cost between £20 and £50 a night. Well-appointed **modern hotel rooms** cost between £40 and £80; rooms in the more luxurious hotels in São Paulo or Rio will cost from £120. All prices usually include a generous breakfast.



Food & drink

Brazil is an **increasingly exciting culinary destination**, with the northern region – which includes Belém – one of the country's real foodie highlights. Be sure to try the river fish (including firm-fleshed, juicy *tambaqui* and *pacu*),

takaka (a tart prawn soup served in manioc juice and spiced with tingly jambu leaves) and the **Amazon power berries** – açaí and camu camu – best taken juiced.

São Paulo is famous for its fine dining establishments, such as D.O.M, but it also has the largest ethnic Japanese community outside Japan, and an associated proliferation of great **sushi and sashimi** restaurants, especially in Liberdade. The locals love *pizza paulistana*, which comes laden with far more cheese than the Italian original.



What to pack

Essential extras include light, long-sleeved shirts and trousers; repellent and a **mosquito net** for Belém and the Ilha do Marajó; and a raincoat and jumper for São Paulo's cool nights.

BRAZIL HIGHLIGHTS

1 Ilha do Marajó One of the world's largest river islands, fringed with fabulous beaches, thick with virgin forest, and boasting a police force that patrols on water buffalos.

2 Ver-o-Peso market, Belém The Amazon's largest fruit, vegetable and food market. It sells a fabulous array of completely unfamiliar produce – from bizarre armour-plated fish to love potions, arts and crafts, and freshly harvested Brazil nuts.

3 Theatro da Paz Opera House, Belém A lavish neoclassical theatre based on Milan's Scala and built in Italian marble and English iron with rubber boom money. See a concert in the newly refurbished auditorium.

4 Templários, Belém The Amazon's wildest music venue plays psychedelic surf guitar music and *carimbó* to a cool, alternative crowd.

5 Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo A sweeping collection of Brazilian art and photography. Be sure to visit the complex's Resistance Memorial and museum to those lost under the dictatorship, on the ground floor.

6 Terraço Itália, São Paulo Dreadful restaurant with extraordinary views of the endless sea of skyscrapers that makes-up São Paulo's skyline.

7 Ibiraapuera Park, São Paulo The tiny green lung of the megalopolis makes a welcome break from the concrete. It is home to a string of iconic Oscar Niemeyer buildings as well as several interesting museums including the Museu Afro Brasil.

8 Ubatuba, São Paulo After the city you'll crave the beach, and nowhere in Brazil has better sand than this little place. Come during the week to miss the Paulistano weekenders.



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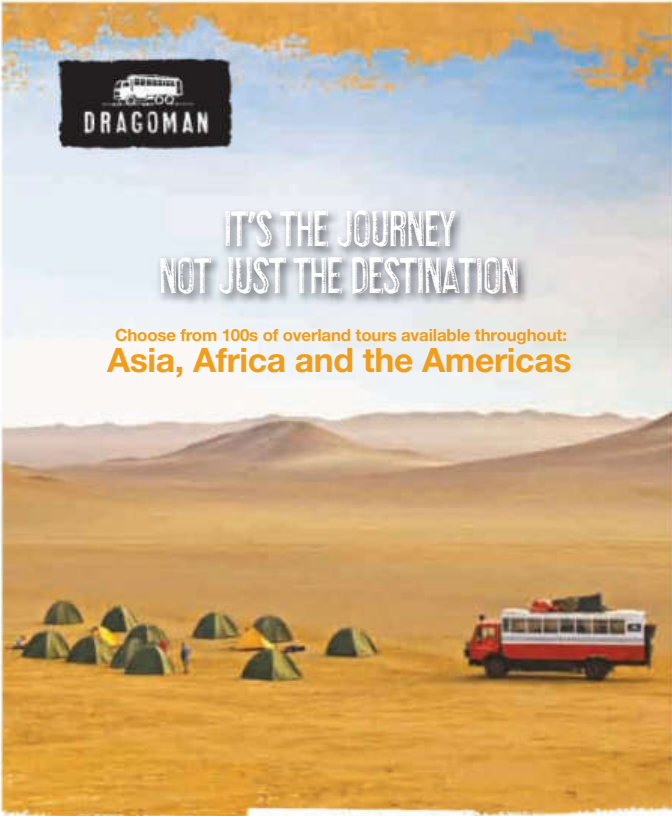
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How I got into Travel



Sue Grimwood

Senior Travel Expert for the Americas team, Steppes Travel, (steppestravel.com)

Sue is at one with the chilly Arctic regions

How long have you worked for Steppes? I've worked six years at Steppes, out of 20 years in travel.

What did you do before and what attracted you to the job?

Having started working as a reprographic artist, I took a year out that got somewhat extended. I then returned five years later and fell into travel. Then I started out selling small group adventure holidays, before joining Steppes.

What do you like about your role? Being able to put together interesting itineraries to really out-of-the-way places that are often once-in-a-lifetime trips for our clients. I love talking to people about the wilderness of the polar regions and the wildlife that exists there and then hearing all about their unforgettable experiences when they return from their trip.

What challenges have you faced? Clients who want guaranteed communications at the ends of the earth – I think they should embrace the solitude.

How has your career progressed at Steppes? I started in sales and now lead the Americas team.

Tell us about your favourite moments so far. Being truly blown away by South Georgia and smelling a wild polar bear's breath.

Wanderlust

Sub-editor/writer

Do you know AITO from ABTA and Zanzibar from Zambia? Can you identify an emperor penguin from a king penguin and spot a typo at a hundred metres? Are you as passionate about good grammar as you are about travel? Then Wanderlust wants to hear from you! We are looking for an experienced sub-editor to come and join us in this full-time role based in our Windsor office.

As well as having a meticulous eye for detail and experience of fact checking, you'll need to know and love travel, and be able to contribute sparkingly clean copy, authoritative round-ups or intelligent copy revisions, both for the magazine and the website.

This is not a role for a newcomer and those without relevant experience will not be considered (a subbing test will form part of the interview process). It is also NOT an on-the-road travel writing position: you will be based in our offices in central Windsor, UK.

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ATI Holidays129 VT	Chinkara Journeys 132 T	HighLives..... 130 VT	Paramo 132	Steppes Travel 131 V	Wanderlust Tripfinder 126
Abercrombie & Kent..... 58 T	Cox and Kings 3, 28, 29 VT	Holiday Architects 40 VT	Pettitts 95 V	Sunvil Traveller 122 VT	Wendy Wu Tours..... 40, 136 VT
Adventure Travel Show 80	Discover Persia 132	Japan Custom Tours 130	Polartec..... 19	Swarovski UK Ltd 68	Wexas Travel Direct 66 VT
Adventure Travel Show	Discover The World 66 VT	KE Adventure 130 VT	Powertraveller 72	Tracks Safaris 129 V	Wild Frontiers 95
Seminars 126	Dragoman..... 129 T	Llama Travel..... 130 T	Ramblers WW Holidays..... 56 VT	TransIndus 66 VT	
Audley Travel Group..... 40, 105 VT	Ecuador Ministry of Tourism IFC	Lyon Equipment Ltd 17	Regent Holidays 103 VT	Travel the Unknown..... 132 VT	
Aurora Expeditions..... 66	Explore Worldwide..... 58, 95 T	Mind 129	Rickshaw Travel 122	Tribes Travel Ltd..... 129 VT	
Bamboo Travel 42 VT	Family Travel Show IBC	Mountain Kingdoms 58	Rohan 105	Tucan Travel 44, 122 VT	
Borderlands Travel 132	Families Worldwide..... 72 VT	Oasis Overland 132 VT	SAS Travel Ltd..... 132	Undiscovered Destinations .. 95 VT	
Caxton FX..... 105	Goyo Travel 130	On the Go Tours 25, OBC V	Selective Asia..... 44 VT	Veloso Tours 122	
Chameleon Worldwide..... 72 T	Grand American Adventures . 58 VT	Oyster Worldwide 132 T	SilverSea Expedition..... 25	Ventureco Worldwide 130	

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Travel Company Tales



World Expeditions

Gordon Steer

The UK manager for the adventure tour operator on staying on the path less travelled as the firm celebrates 40 years

How did World Expeditions start?

Our story began in 1975, when Australian Himalayan Expeditions began its operations with trekking holidays in Nepal.

Over the next decade, the company expanded its operations to include all seven continents and, to reflect the broader spread of holidays on offer, Australian Himalayan Expeditions changed its name to World Expeditions.

We now have offices in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, and remain responsive to emerging destinations to satisfy the demands of the modern traveller.

Early challenges?

Behind any great adventure travel company stands a great story of lost loads, flipped rafts, delays, outdated computer systems and found clients!

When World Expeditions began 40 years ago, plans were made on the phone and reservations were recorded by hand. New routes in distant countries were established and trekked for months before details were read in brochures by future travellers. Today, responses are immediate and in real time. The Nepal earthquakes also posed a huge challenge – 17 World Expeditions trekking groups were in the country at the time.

What makes World Expeditions unique?

We've always been strived to be innovative and a leader in our field. We were the first operator to offer trekking trips in Mongolia, Tibet and Japan and cycling holidays in India and China. Over the years, we have worked with some of the most acknowledged adventurers and from the very beginning



there was much effort placed on creating operations that did not negatively impact on the environment and that provided benefit to the local communities.

Future plans?

Our mantra has always been to 'take the paths less travelled' so we want to keep pushing the boundaries. Our portfolio covers more than 500 stand-alone itineraries, so in addition to 'bucket list' classics such as Peru, Kilimanjaro and Vietnam, seasoned travellers come to us because they know we can also take them to remote and off the beaten track destinations across the globe, from North Korea to East Timor.

www.worldexpeditions.com



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WIN A TRIP TO CHINA

See the authentic side of Asia on a new style of trip from Wendy Wu Tours...

Visiting Asia's classic sights is one thing but fully immersing yourself in them is something completely different.

Wendy Wu Tours is launching a whole new range of adventures, called Discovery Tours, which will see you walk, boat, hike and cycle through some of the continent's best bits, bringing you closer to its people, traditions and celebrations.

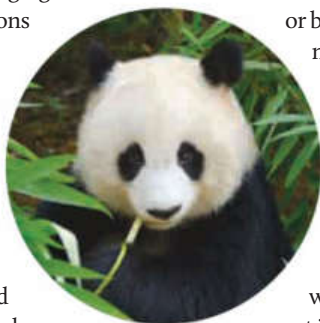
For instance, instead of making a whistle-stop tour of China's highlights, on Discovery Tours you might start your days with t'ai chi and finish in a local noodle house – as well as seeing sights such as the Forbidden City and Terracotta Army. Indeed, Wendy Wu Tour's *China Explorer* trip – which you have a chance of winning – includes an extensive trek along a less-frequented stretch of the Great Wall and offers the chance to visit the pandas at Bifengxia.

All across Asia

Wendy Wu Tours' new trips aren't limited to China: Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan,

India, Nepal, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Cambodia are all covered, too. And there are many options.

Culture fans can spend time with the nomads of Mongolia while exploring the country's 'singing sands'. Or how about pondering over Laos' mysterious Plain of Jars, taking a tuk-tuk around Angkor's temples, meditating with a Taoist priest on the misty slopes of Weibaoshan or browsing the traditional markets of Kathmandu.



Festival fans are spoilt for choice: tours take in Chinese New Year in Hong Kong, the shimmering Ice Festival in Harbin and Mongolia's Naadam Festival, where you can watch competitors battle it out in the three 'manly arts'.

More adventurous types can hike up to Everest Base Camp, cycle amid the temples and bazaars of Udaipur's Old City or hop on a Vespa for a ride through the streets of Saigon.

Whatever area of Asia you're in though, with Wendy Wu Tours you'll be eating, drinking, exploring and breathing like a local. Don't just visit Asia – live Asia.



HOW TO WIN

Wendy Wu Tours is offering you and a friend the chance to win one of its new Discovery Tours, the 15-day *China Explorer*, which includes visits to Beijing, Xi'an, Bifengxia Panda Reserve, Yangtze River and Shanghai. Two runner ups will win a 6" Kindle eReader Touch Screen.

How to enter

To be in with a chance of winning this trip to China, just finish the following sentence in 100 words or less:

"I love Asia because..."

To enter and for full terms and conditions, go to wanderlust.co.uk/competitions or send your answer to the Wanderlust office (address p2). The closing date is 25 November 2015. State 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by *Wanderlust* or its sponsors.



Wendy Wu Tours

Work & play
São Paulo is a
busy, high-rise,
traffic-riddled city
– but it knows
how to party too



São Paulo, Brazil

Brazil's most populous city – a mass of traffic and concrete — can bewilder at first. But take the time to explore, and you'll soon be drawn in, says **Alex Robinson**

i Before you arrive

What it lacks in beauty São Paulo makes up for in sheer size. You'll clock this from the plane (the left is usually best for views). With its perpetual concrete and traffic-soaked six-lane highways, this supercity can feel imposing, even impenetrable, at first. But don't let that put you off.

São Paulo is where Latin America studies and works hard, but it's also where it comes to play. Nowhere else gets close for nightlife, restaurants, shopping and vibrant, diverse culture. Nowhere welcomes visitors more enthusiastically. You're a gringo in Rio. But in São Paulo you're part of the throng, and making friends is easy.

The city's reputation for crime is deserved but it's almost completely restricted to the favela slums on the outer margins. It's safe to walk around the central areas by day, though you shouldn't flash your jewellery or camera around. Take a cab when exploring at night.

Before the 19th century coffee boom, São Paulo was little more than a Jesuit mission on the edge of Brazil's vast interior. Coffee money and railway trade built grand avenues and lavish mansions – a handful of which survive. Industry boomed in the 20th century making São Paulo Brazil's wealthiest city; it's now responsible for 50% of the country's industrial output. It draws in millions of internal migrants from the poor north east, and from Europe, Asia and the Middle East. São Paulo has the world's largest population of Japanese outside Japan, huge numbers of Italians, Koreans, Syrians and Lebanese, and the largest populations of Portuguese and Spanish outside Iberia.

✈ At the airport

Guarulhos Airport lies 25km north-east of the city centre and is served by direct flights from London Heathrow on British Airways and TAM. Flight time is 11 hours and returns cost from £550.

UK nationals don't require visas but will need to fill out a landing card. Expect to queue for 20-40 minutes at immigration. In arrivals there are ATMs (Banco Bradesco is the most reliable), currency exchange and a tourist information booth.

🚖 Getting into town

Guarucop (guarucop.com.br) taxis are bookable through a booth in the airport. Expect to pay around R\$150 (£25) to a destination in the city centre (40-60mins, depending on traffic).

Airport Bus Service (www.airportbusservice.com.br) runs hourly buses between Terminal 4 and destinations in the city centre between 6.15am and 11.15pm; singles cost R\$42 (£7).

🚆 Other ways to arrive

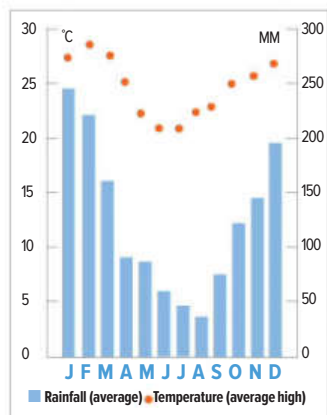
São Paulo's trains are local only. Buses run to Rio and other Brazilian cities; most leave from the Tiete bus terminal (rodoviariaonline.com.br). ►



HERE'S THE PLAN...

Essential Info

Population: 11 million (greater São Paulo, around 19.5 million)
Languages: Portuguese
Timezone: GMT-3 (Oct-Feb GMT-2)
International dialling code: +55
Visas: Not required by UK nationals
Currency: Brazilian real (R\$), currently around R\$6 to the UK£
Highest viewpoint: From the Terraço Itália restaurant in the Consolação district you can see Niemeyer's iconic Copan



building (completed in the 1960s), the old city centre and the Serra da Cantareira mountains.
Health issues: Hepatitis A and B vaccinations are recommended. There is a mild risk of dengue. Avoid drinking tap water. Don't walk around the city after dark.

Recommended guidebook: *São Paulo Focus* (Footprint, 2014; new edition out in 2016)

Web resources: Few and far between in English – the official guide, cidadesaopaulo.com, is only in Portuguese; visitesaopaulo.com has excellent up-to-date info and is available in English through Google translate.

Apps: Veja São Paulo (free); São Paulo mTrip, with offline maps (\$4.99)

Climate: São Paulo has warm, wet summers (October–March) with daytime temperatures in the high 20°Cs. Winters (April–September) are cooler and drier, with temperatures peaking at 24°C. Temperatures fall by 8–10°C at night. Cold fronts from the Antarctic can bring chilly spells at any time of year.

First Day's Tour

Start with a stroll along the city's skyscraper-lined main avenue, **Avenida Paulista** (pictured). Then take a cab to Luz to see Brazilian art in the **Pinacoteca gallery** and the sobering **Memorial da Resistência** (both pinacoteca.org.br), dedicated to the thousands who died or disappeared during the years of fascist and military dictatorship.

Hop in a cab to **Clandestino** (book ahead; +55 11 2861 0010) to enjoy cutting-edge Brazilian fusion cooking from Bel Coelho (who trained in Michelin three-starred El Celler de Can Roca in Catalunya). Then stroll down adjacent **Beco de Batman** to see vibrant street art.

Spend the afternoon browsing the plush boutiques and sipping creamy coffees in **Jardins**. Try Cris Barros for fabulous frocks (crisbarros.com.br), Osklen (osklen.com) for smart-casual, sporty holiday wear and Vartanian (jackvartanian.com) for glittering gold and Brazilian stones.

Arrive at the **Terraço Itália** (www.terraçoitalia.com.br) in time for sunset and superb views of São Paulo as the city



lights come on. Avoid the food; instead, eat at Alex Attala's **D.O.M** (reservations essential; domrestaurante.com.br), number nine on the San Pellegrino list of best restaurants in the world, and offering a menu of Amazon ingredients served with European panache.

Dance the night away in Vila Madalena at **Grazie a Dio** (grazieadio.com.br) or **Ó do Borogodó** (www.facebook.com/odoborogodobar) samba clubs.

BEST BARGAIN

Don't scrimp. The food, fashion and nightlife are fabulous but to get the most out of São Paulo you'll need to spend – albeit far less than in cities like Paris or NYC.



Where to Stay

Top end: Tivoli Mofarrej (Alameda Santos, 1437; tivolihotels.com) is a luxurious tower hotel in an unbeatable location, near the Jardins shops and Avenida Paulista. Opt for a sumptuous upper-floor room with marble bathrooms and twinkling cityscape view. Book a table at the scenic top-floor restaurant (above). Doubles from £135.

Mid range: Transamérica Classic Ópera (Alameda Lorena, 1748; transamericagroup.com.br) offers elegant

modern flats, a stroll from the shops in Jardins. Choose a room above floor 15 for quietness and views. From £60.

Budget: Guest Urban (Rua Lisboa, 493; guesturbansp.com.br) is a converted townhouse in a quiet back street in the fashionable Pinheiros neighbourhood. Bright, airy rooms have boutique hotel touches – colourful scatter cushions, heavy cotton, art photography prints; there's also a sun deck lounge and free bikes for guests. From £35.

Stay or Go

You need a long weekend to see all the museums and sample the best of the restaurants, bars and shops. Don't miss **MASP** (masp.art.br), for the southern hemisphere's finest European Old Master art collections and the **Football Museum** (above; museudofutebol.org.br), housed in the art deco Pacaembu stadium and celebrating Brazil's glory days.

For fresh air head to **Parelheiros**, in the city's southern reaches, to see pristine cloud forest or the **Botanical**

Gardens, 6km south of the centre, where hummingbirds flit over the flowers and howler monkeys screech in the trees.

By night browse the bars of **Vila Madalena** to dance to fervid *forró*, a jig from the north east, or smooch to Brazilian jazz at Baretto (fasano.com.br).

When the city has worn thin, rest on the São Paulo coast lazing on a beach of fine white sand backed by towering forest. The best is **Praia do Félix** (pousadapraiaofelix.com.br).

Thumb-thing special
The Old Man of Storr –
reputedly a giant's
thumb – looms above the
Trotternish peninsula



Isle of Skye, Scotland

A magical landscape that inspired tales of fairies, giants and water spirits, today Skye boasts some of the darkest skies in Europe, as **Sally Coffey** discovers

There's something so other-worldly about Skye that even the most cynical traveller can't help but look expectantly for the supernatural creatures said to inhabit Faerie Glen. It's hardly surprising that Steven Spielberg chose this unique geological formation – a cluster of cone-shaped hills near Uig on the Trotternish peninsula – as one of the locations for his 2016 movie adaptation of Roald Dahl's *BFG*; the ethereal setting is certainly a suitable backdrop for a fantasy tale.

And herein lies the beauty of Skye, the largest island in the Inner Hebrides: folklore is embedded in the landscape. It's no wonder, given the number of awe-inspiring spots Skye packs into its modest 1,658 sq km. Such tales surely represent just one way that inhabitants and visitors have found through the years to explain the extraordinary natural marvels unfolding before them.

Like Faerie Glen, the Fairy Bridge between Dunvegan and Edinbane is the backdrop for a folk story. It was here, it's said, that the chief of the Clan MacLeod was left heartbroken when his sweetheart, a fairy princess, returned home. Perhaps the Fairy Flag, kept as a MacLeod family heirloom at nearby Dunvegan Castle, was given to him as a gift of protection by his departing lover.

One of the most recognisable sights on Skye is the Old Man of Storr, a dramatic pinnacle that juts out from the craggy Trotternish Ridge. Some say it is the thumb of a giant who was buried in the earth; others claim that it is a reminder of another giant and his wife who, fleeing attackers, made the fateful mistake of turning to look back – and were instantly turned to stone.

Whatever the truth, it's a great spot from which to drink in the spectacular views of the unique topography. It feels as though you've reached the end of the world – in a good way.

Of course, not all of Skye's stories are mythical; many of its sites themselves bore witness to important historical events. After defeat at Culloden and the collapse of the Jacobite cause in 1746, Bonnie Prince Charlie chose to flee Scotland, and it was via Skye that he made his escape. Fiona MacDonald risked her life to smuggle him across, disguising the Stuart 'Young Pretender' as her Irish maid, Betty Burke, and carrying him to Skye aboard a small boat. You can visit Fiona's grave at Kilmuir cemetery in the Trotternish, where a large memorial commemorates her bravery.

This 300th anniversary year since the first Jacobite Rising of 1715, led by Charlie's father (the 'Old Pretender', James Stuart), is a good time to visit Skye. And Kilmuir is a great place to begin exploring clan culture. Once so alive here, it's been slowly eroded since the Jacobite defeat, but still hangs in the air like an apparition. ►

◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

■ Essential Info

When to go: For bright skies and clear days, visit May or early June; in winter you might glimpse the northern lights. The Isle of Skye Highland Games are held each August.

Getting there and around:

Glasgow has the nearest international airport, 300km to the south-east; Inverness airport is closer (150km), with flights from London, Dublin and Manchester. Trains of the West Highland Line (scotrail.com) run from Glasgow to Mallaig, from where CalMac ferries (calmac.co.uk) sail to Armadale in southern Skye (foot passengers £4.75). Stagecoach buses (stagecoachbus.com) run from Kyle of Lochalsh on the mainland onto Skye and around the island.

By far the easiest way to get around is to hire a car from the airport or a local company such as Morar Motors (morarmotors.co.uk), based in Mallaig and Kyle of Lochalsh.

Where to stay: Kinloch Lodge (kinloch-lodge.co.uk) is a spectacular

former clan hunting lodge set at the foot of Kinloch Hill on the Sleat peninsula in the south-east of the island. Luxurious doubles cost from £198 with breakfast.

Sykes Cottages (sykescottages.co.uk) has a selection of self-catering properties across the island, many in gorgeous locations, with prices starting at £233 for a week.

Where to eat: The menu at the Three Chimneys (Dunvegan; threechimneys.co.uk) is inspired by the natural larder of land and sea, drawing on the culinary heritage of Scotland – it won a Michelin star in 2014. There's stylishly luxurious accommodation here, too.

Scurrybreac ([Scurrybreac Road, Portree; scurrybreac.com](http://Scurrybreac.com)) is a little less formal but still offers fine dining and top local cuisine.

Further info: There's information and inspiration aplenty at skye.co.uk.

TOP TIP

Carefully check the weather before planning your excursions – if it's going to be misty later in the day then your 10km hike to a viewpoint might be a disappointment.



Day 1: STROLL & SING

Start your day in the colourful harbour town of **Portree**, where Bonnie Prince Charlie said his final goodbye to Flora MacDonald after she smuggled him across to Skye en route to escaping Scotland. Framed by cliffs, its natural harbour is beautiful. **Café Arriba** (cafearriba.co.uk) on Quay Brae is a great place to take in the views and watch the fishing boats come and go while you fuel up for the day ahead.

After breakfast, head north along the western side of the Trotternish

peninsula to magical **Faerie Glen**. It's not signposted – the

fairies know where they're going – but you'll find it on an Ordnance Survey map (Explorer 408, Skye – Trotternish & The Storr). It's an easy, though sometimes slippery, hike of a couple of kilometres from the Uig Hotel, about 20km north of Portree, though you could happily spend a couple of hours exploring the glen and climbing the many hillocks.

Finish your day with a sing and a jig at the **Edinbane Inn** (edinbaneinn.co.uk), a warm and welcoming bar offering hearty meals, ales from the Isle of Skye Brewery, and live music sessions on Sunday afternoons and Wednesday nights.



Day 2: WALK WITH DINOSAURS

Start early and head to **Staffin**, a 25km drive from Portree. On An Corran beach, search for the dinosaur footprints, trodden into the rock 160 million years ago (clue: they're near the slipway). Once you've seen the Staffin fossils in situ you can visit the nearby **Staffin Museum** (open by appointment: 01470 562321), which has fascinating exhibits, including the world's smallest dinosaur footprint.

From Staffin head north along the road, travelling on the east side of the incredible **Quiraing**. This supernatural landscape is made up of glacial rock formations on the northernmost summit of the Trotternish (which

means 'pillared fortress'); check out the roadside view of **Kilt Rock** – a sea cliff said to look like a kilt, with basalt columns forming the pleats and the sandstone base giving an almost tartan hue. Just in front of Kilt Rock is **Mealt Waterfall**, which plummets down the rock face.

By now you should have worked up a healthy appetite so head back to Portree for lunch at **Scurrybreac** (open 12noon-2pm, Thursday-Saturday), a popular new restaurant that began life as a pop-up. Then drive on for 30 minutes to reach Talisker, the island's only distillery, for an afternoon of whisky tasting.



Day 3: HIT THE BEAUTIFUL SOUTH

Walk to the cave at **Elgol**, where Bonnie Prince Charlie hid before making his escape from Skye. The 4km walk starts from the jetty in Elgol, with views of the Black Cullin mountains – one of the best views in Britain. As you walk the boggy path you'll be able to see across to the Isle of Eigg and will pass the overhanging crag of **Suidhe Biorach** (Pointed Seat), which legend says cures women of infertility. You'll need to check tides to ensure you can descend to the beach to enter the cave where the Prince slept following his night's march from Portree.

Next, take a boat ride to magnificent **Loch Coruisk**, that some believe has

its own *kelpie* (water horse).

Three-hour trips run from Elgol aboard the small **Bella Jane** (bellajane.co.uk) four times a day, April-November, weather depending (£24 return; one-way options available for those who wish to camp overnight).

Back on dry land, have dinner at Michelin-starred **Kinloch Lodge** (a 40-min drive) before visiting one of the island's **Dark Sky Discovery Sites** such as Kinloch Forest; in November look out for the cluster of the Pleiades or Orion's belt. With no light pollution to mar the view, it's like having your own private planetarium. You won't be disappointed with the show. 📺

Urban adventure
Varied Gran Canaria
offers great walking
right from the capital,
Las Palmas



Gran Canaria, Spain

In 2015 the volcanic Canary Island celebrates ten years of its huge Biosphere Reserve, making now the ideal time to head there for winter sun walks...

i Get orientated

Sunny Gran Canaria is perhaps best known for being a fly-n-flop package holiday spot, with tourists drawn to the golden beaches on its south coast. But the third-largest of the Spanish Canary Islands is actually so much more. With abundant wildlife and varied terrain, it's more like a continent in miniature.

Gran Canaria is the result of millions of years of volcanic activity, resulting in a landscape of craggy peaks, craters, sand dunes, lush ravines and impressive rock formations – such as dramatic Roque Nublo and El Fraile ('The Friar'), and Bentayga, where aboriginal Guanche peoples once performed rituals. There are 32 protected areas here and, in 2005, over a third of the island was designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Fortunately, a host of trails snake through the island's rugged interior, making it easy to explore.

✈ Getting there & around

There are direct flights to Las Palmas, Gran Canaria's capital, from many UK cities. Flight time is from around 4.5 hours.

Global (www.globalsu.net) runs an extensive network of bus routes around Gran Canaria. Multipass fares to a range of destinations start from €12 (£8.75). Alternatively, hop on *guaguas* (minibuses; guaguas.com), which operate across the island. Single fares start from €1.40 (£1); a ten-journey pass costs €8.50 (£6.20).

Gran Canaria is easy to explore on foot. Bicycle hire starts from around €14 (£10) a day; guided tours cost extra.

🚶 The visit

Hiking routes run like veins across the wilds of Gran Canaria, offering a range of options for walkers of all abilities.

A good option close to Las Palmas – about a 20-minute drive – is a walk to Bandama crater. You can either circle around the rim or descend into its extinct caldera, now overgrown with palms and orange trees.

Tejeda, a village in the island's mountainous middle, is a good base. From here you can take in a number of Gran Canaria's main landmarks. For instance, hike up via mountain passes to the carved stone cross of Cruz de Tejeda and Roque Nublo, the island's second-highest peak – you might even see nearby Tenerife on a clear day.

Other interesting areas include the green valleys near Firgas (known as the 'village of water') or the pine forests and terraced hillsides of Tamadaba Natural Park.

Waymarking is variable. Signs do exist on some routes but it is best to take an up-to-date guidebook and map, or join a guided walk. ►

◀ Get to know Gran Canaria...

1 Embalse Caidero de la Nina

This reservoir was built in the interior in the mid-20th century to relieve Gran Canaria's constant water shortage (today the emphasis is on desalination plants).



2 Roque Nublo

Known as Cloud Mountain, Roque Nublo is a striking rock column and the remains of a former volcano pipe.



3 Pinar de Tamadaba

Light pine forest covers 1,444m-high Tamadaba. The nearby Barranco de Agaete is considered to be one of the most beautiful barrancos (ravines) on the island.



4 Barranco de Fataga

From the centre of the island, deep gorges – such as Barranco de Fataga – lead out to the coast. The floors of the narrow valleys are used for agriculture. Potatoes and grains are grown on terraced fields at higher elevations.



◆ Cruz de Tejeda marks the highest pass on the island (1,490m).



5 Caldera de Bandama

The crater cauldron is visible evidence of the island's volcanic past, formed by a violent explosion.

6 Pozo de las Nieves

Pozo or Pico de las Nieves (1,949m) is the highest mountain on the island. Despite its name (meaning 'snow fountain'), there is hardly ever any snow here.



7 Dunas de Maspalomas

These extensive sand dunes give you that Sahara feeling. They were created during the last glacial period, when the sea level was up to 90m lower than it is now.

■ Essentials

Language: Spanish

Time: GMT+1 (Mar-Oct GMT)

Visas: Not required by UK nationals

Money: Euro (€), currently €1.4 to the UK£

Health: Take a valid EHIC card and high SPF sun screen



This feature is adapted from Marco Polo's *Travel Handbook: Gran Canaria*, which contains infographics, insider tips, tour suggestions and a large pull-out map. See marco-polo.com

Wanderlust
TRAVEL MAGAZINE

Next issue

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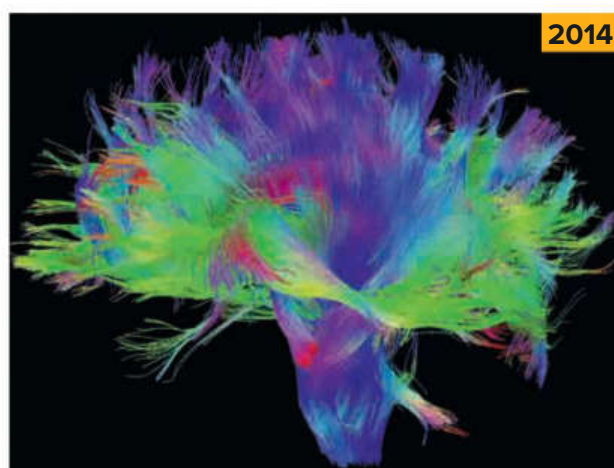
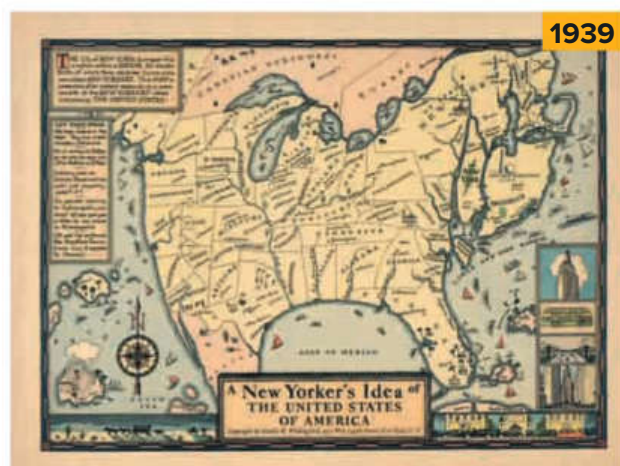
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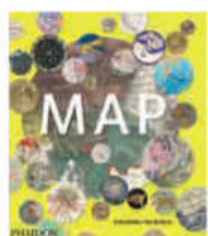
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Mapping out the future of travel



Maps have been helping travellers find their way for hundreds of years, but in the 21st century they have become much more than simple navigation aids. The fascinating progression of cartography is detailed in *Map: Exploring the World*.

The six examples above hint at the treasures inside: from a 1930s maps of the US through a New Yorker's eyes to a colour-coded Paris (1863);

from 1940s anti-Nazi artwork to a 3D panorama of Yellowstone and Grand Teton; from a graphic illustrating the extent of flooding caused by Hurricane Katrina to a technicolour 'map' of the brain's neural pathways. From mapping the planet to mapping the mind. What next?

Map: Exploring the World is out now (Phaidon, £40); www.phaidon.com

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